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**'They can because they think they can?': The education of pupils
at two secondary schools for the blind, 1920-58**

Jeanette Margaret Normanton Erry

BA (Hons), M.Hist.

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Abstract

Blind children were one of the first 'disabled' groups to be given an education by the State. However, for most children with a visual impairment, this schooling was only at an elementary level. This study looks at how pupils at Worcester College for the Blind and Chorleywood College for girls with little or no sight came to have the opportunity to receive the academic education which could provide them with access to the universities and professions. This is discussed in the context of the political and social environment of the period between 1920 and 1958, with an assessment of the continuities and changes.

The purpose of the study is to examine the complexity of factors which influenced the education of visually impaired children. No one explanation, either based on social control or progressive humanitarianism, can determine the development of special education. Class and gender as well as perceptions of 'disability' did play a role. The aim is then to judge the level to which the resultant education was enabling in terms of providing educational opportunities which could lead students towards active Citizenship and fulfilling employment. The study triangulates sources written from above by Government, charities and the governing bodies with school records as well as interviews and written accounts to give a voice to the former students.

In this thesis, variations in the experience of children with different impairments are examined alongside the level of influence possessed by blind people themselves. The nature of the education provided challenged the perceptions of society in some ways, while not attempting to confront the inequalities which existed in the mid-twentieth century. This resulted in a schooling which was enabling in its academic nature, but, while not disabling, left students unprepared for some of the skills required for adult life.

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Abbreviations

Birm	Birmingham Archives
BRIB	Birmingham Royal Institute for the Blind
CPA	Charles Parker Archive (Birmingham Archives)
CTB	College of Teachers of the Blind
CW	Chorleywood College for Girls with Little or No Sight
HMC	Headmasters' Conference
HMI	His (Her) Majesty's Inspector(ate)
JJC	John Johnson Collection, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford
LCC	London County Council
LEA	Local Education Authority
MRC	Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick
NA	National Archives
NCW	New College Worcester Archive
NCWFSA	New College Worcester Former Students' Association
NIB	National Institute for the Blind
RNIB	Royal National Institute of the Blind Archive, Stockport
RNC	Royal Normal College for the Blind
WCB	Worcester College for the Blind
WRO	Worcestershire Record Office, County Hall, Worcester

1. Introduction: Re-Assessing the Schools for the Blind

It was here first that light, brought to blind eyes, emerged from darkness, and here light first spread among those once stricken by cruel and harsh fate.

Now it is that manners, books, skills, study of law all enrich us for a life of ease or hardship. We shall go on to high positions, we whose forebears were deprived by destiny of all such things.

Now it is that healthy exercise drives our limbs, while learning fosters our minds; nor are we ashamed to have practised games, we whose courage thus thrives the more.

Extract from a translation of the Latin school hymn of Worcester College for the Blind.¹

The promotion of Worcester College written into its school hymn suggests that this secondary school for blind boys was working positively to allow its students to succeed in adult life in a manner which may appear to conform with a traditional historical view that special education was operating with an enabling benevolent intent. This piece of school promotion written by two former students would seem to challenge the sweeping condemnation of special schools and their 'disabling' role which will be shown to have dominated radical revisionist views in the thirty years since Sally Tomlinson produced her book on the *Sociology of Special Education*.²

As a teacher working in a special school for visually impaired children, and an historian by training, I have become sceptical about the applicability of some of the assessments made

about the history of special education to the education of blind children.³ My work as an educational professional could lead to the accusation made by critics of special schooling, such as French and Swain, that I am perpetuating a 'History [that] is owned and documented by those in power'.⁴ Writers such as Tomlinson, whose views will be examined in the next section, would describe me as having a 'vested interest' in presenting a more favourable view in order to maintain my employment and status.⁵ However, Patricia Potts, reflecting on educational provision for the 'disabled', has argued that

Histories can only be of use if we put ourselves into the historical picture, allowing history to affect our lives and our lives to affect history... Thisshould be seen as the basis for a reflective and useful approach to history.⁶

My perspective has been developed by talking to my registered blind parents, one of whom went to a non-grammar special school, whilst the other was left to cope with no assistance in a mainstream school. Also, I have met a number of former students who have attained leading positions in the professions and national and international charities. As a result, I have come to believe that by producing a fine-grained historical study focusing on schools for blind children I can aid the appreciation of the diverse influences which can be involved in the development of an educational system.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the complex interaction of factors impacting upon the education at Worcester College for the Blind and Chorleywood College for girls in the inter-war period and then compare this with those operating after the Second World War, when both establishments had become grammar schools. By placing the development of

one group receiving special schooling within the context of the social and cultural environment, the aim is to consider the nexus of class and gender with disability.

1.1 *The dangers of presentism*

Many of the recent works discussing the history of special education have come from writers with a sociological perspective, looking to identify trends. These can tend to rule out the potential power of agency, other than for social control. McCulloch and Richardson have been critical of those sociologically-based accounts which lack the ‘sophistication’ to pay ‘sufficient attention to changing contexts’.⁷ The past must be understood in its own terms, rather than those of modern society, if the dangers of “presentism” are to be avoided.⁸ Whilst sociological studies have raised many interesting questions, there is still a role for an historical assessment because any one-dimensional approach cannot interpret the whole picture of special education and demonstrate the differences in provision.

Nevertheless, the traditional assessment of progress and the benevolent humanitarianism of the ‘pioneers’ which was suggested by the writers of the Warnock Report do require critical examination:

As with mainstream education, education for the handicapped began with individual and charitable enterprise. There followed in time the intervention of government, first to support voluntary effort and make good deficiencies through state provision, and finally, to create a national framework in which public and

voluntary agencies could act in partnership to see that all children, whatever their disability, received a suitable education.⁹

Warnock was influenced by the explanation put forward in 1963 by D. G. Pritchard in his study of *Education and the Handicapped 1760-1960*.¹⁰ Pritchard had been highly critical of the nineteenth century institutions, and highlighted how policy-making was fragmented and reworked as a result of changing contexts, but adopted what was, in many ways, a Whiggish approach to the history of special education with an assumption of a continual striving for progress.¹¹ In this tale of development, the 1944 Education Act has been perceived as setting up the 'national framework' in line with the war-time consensus that there should be 'equality of educational opportunity as between class and class, town and country'.¹²

These progressive ideas continued to influence writers with Cole identifying the role which social control did play initially as a causal factor, but stressing the role of 'humanitarian conviction':

There was ... a genuine wish to help such children achieve the dignity of a self-supporting, integrated adulthood.¹³

In her thesis on the education of the blind from the 1870s to the 1920s (with her research focused primarily on records of the East Anglian Institute for the Blind and Deaf and the Norwich School for the Blind), Lyn Payne has identified a 'veritable golden age' with 'important advances'.¹⁴ She has claimed that the archives contain a 'wealth of material challenging some widely held assumptions about the relative harshness and insularity of

institutions for the blind'.¹⁵ June Rose also used assumptions of humanitarianism to demonstrate the work of individuals in enabling 'progress':

For over 100 years educational pioneers have been battling to create and expand opportunities for the full intellectual and physical development and the good life for blind children.¹⁶

When trying to apply these traditional progressive views to the development of secondary schools for blind children, questions arise because such accounts do not appear to evaluate the full impact of either economic pressures or class and gender issues. They can be interpreted as assuming that the development of secondary, and then grammar, schools for the blind were simply a consequence of different intellectual needs.¹⁷

By the 1980s, the utilisation of theories from the social sciences was to lead to the creation of a radical revisionist perspective on the history of special education.¹⁸ Sally Tomlinson saw the need to adopt a sociological approach in order to 'demystify social processes and social situations' and allow the acquisition of 'wider social, historical and political perspectives on the policies, practices and processes which make up special education'.¹⁹ She considered that the prevailing 'ideological rationalisation' was obscuring 'the educational, political and economic needs actually served by the expansion'.²⁰ Tomlinson adopted a neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian perspective looking at the roles played by dominant economic and social groups in ensuring their own position through the 'perpetuation of inequalities'.²¹ She presented social control as critical to understanding the education of children with an impairment, with 'ordinary' schools excluding those who

would not be able to conform to the model of education that was being delivered and who might present a problem:

Sociologically, the history of special education must be viewed in terms of the benefits it brought for a developing industrial society.²²

Tomlinson's work does encourage a critique of the involvement of a broader range of factors than had been considered in the progressive histories and does raise questions for a study of the work of schools for blind children on the role which the vested interests of professionals played in ensuring the continuance, and continued expansion, of special education.²³ She considers that understanding has to be based on an appreciation of the 'competition and alliances among interest groups' with the 'strategic power-play' changing after 1945 as educational and medical personnel found that 'medical and psychological interests took precedence'.²⁴

Responding to the criticisms of her original work, Tomlinson did not deny that 'charismatic figures' may have been doing 'good', but maintains her denial of a role for individual agency by asserting that 'their actions did not necessarily "do good" to groups or individuals'.²⁵ By separating the 'handicapped' off into special schools, she considers that the 'pioneers' were stressing the '*incapacity* and *inability*' of their students to cope with a 'normal' education.²⁶ Such a negative view was supported by the former HMI, John Fish, who used his own experiences of special education in Britain and overseas to claim that students were at such schools to be 'cured of learning difficulties', or to be 'cared for in a safe environment away from the rigours' of mainstream education.²⁷

This thesis seeks to examine whether all schools for blind children worked in such a 'disabling' manner, but any attempt at re-assessment has also to consider the manner in which the radical revisionist view on special schools has been supported by the evolution of the Social Model of Disability in the early 1980s. This approach emerged from the Disability Rights Movement with its examination of the factors, including education, which were considered to have prevented people with impairments from gaining civil rights and full equality. Vic Finkelstein and Michael Oliver perceived disability in terms of environmental, structural and attitudinal barriers, all of which were external to the person with an impairment.²⁸ Drawing on the Marxist dialectic, Finkelstein identified the exclusion which resulted from the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalist society.²⁹ Anne Borsay developed this approach for her materialist history of *Disability and Social Policy*, recognising the influence of 'societal factors' and reaching the conclusion that education was not conducted within a 'framework of social rights'.³⁰

For such writers, 'segregated' schooling has been inherently 'disabling' and has played a major role in holding its 'survivors' back. Colin Barnes, when putting the case for anti-discrimination legislation, argues that "rather than equipping disabled children and young people with the appropriate skills and opportunities to live a full and active adult life, it [a 'segregative' education system] conditions them into accepting a devalued social role".³¹ In order to be truly 'enabling', education would have to contribute to the removal of the barriers of attitudes, policies and practices that are essentially external to the person with an impairment. Indeed, Sally French, a former pupil of schools for the visually impaired, has described special schools as having an opposite impact with its 'detrimental effects leading to greater dependency and an increase in existing problems of function and behaviour'.³² Standards in special schools have been portrayed as generally very low with students

suffering from 'intellectual exclusion'.³³ The assumption being that the schools presented a limited curriculum with few opportunities to gain the accreditation of examinations.

French and John Swain have emphasised the applicability of this judgement to schools for the blind, by quoting an interview with Paul, a visually impaired man:

The schools were too isolated, they set very low standards... It's been shown many times with blind and partially sighted people from our generation that they've left school and then gone on and done quite well by their own efforts.³⁴

French has more recently completed *An Oral History of the Education of Visually Impaired People* and recognised that the grammar schools for the blind have produced students who have a more positive view.³⁵ However, French was producing a 'political analysis in order to bring about change'.³⁶ She has also used her own experience at Exhall Grange, which then had a grammar stream for partially sighted pupils, to question whether schools which emphasised the gaining of examination success were 'enabling'; the needs of the impairment were being ignored in an effort to achieve academic success. She sees the schools as accepting the social norms and expecting their students to adapt to fit in. The schools have been accused of promoting an 'underlying message' of 'be superhuman and deny your disability' so that students were left just as unprepared to take a place fully integrated into society; this leads to the question, examined partly through the use of oral history in this study, of whether the two schools were ignoring individual needs or instead were encouraging students to develop alternative strategies to cope with the obstacles presented by society.³⁷

There are weaknesses in some of the criticisms of special education which this historical study seeks to evaluate in relation to the schools for blind children. The reaction of many of the sociologically-based writers against the traditional historical view of special education may have over-simplified developments for students with sensory impairments. Although Tomlinson has included examples relating to blind children at points in her analysis, there are indications of potential inconsistencies in the application of such an all-encompassing condemnation to the schools which served those with sensory impairments. While Tomlinson did use examples from 'normative' categories such as the blind, and expressed a 'hope' that practitioners with these minority groups would be 'interested', she admitted that most of her illustrative detail was based on 'non-normative' categories such as mild educational sub-normality and slow learners.³⁸ French has looked specifically at visually impaired people, but she has not examined the broader historical context which affected the secondary education provided.³⁹

Problems in applying generalisations to the educational experiences of all young people across the range of diverse special educational needs opens up possibilities for producing a nuanced historical study of the education of blind children. Ian Copeland, in his study of the 'backward pupil', has outlined the 'inadequacies of existing sociological paradigms' to explain developments and has been critical of the assumption that special education is an 'unproblematic, homogeneous category.'⁴⁰ John T. Hall has described an 'impairment pecking order', with the sensory disabilities gaining better access to resources than children with learning disabilities.⁴¹ While J. S. Hurt considered that fear led to 'considerations of social control' being the key for those seen as having mental handicaps, he has suggested that genuine concern assisted the development of schooling for those with sensory

impairments.⁴² He asserted that both the visually and hearing impaired have gained from personal influence on their behalf which was not available to other 'disabled' groups:

As many forms of congenital disability do not respect social class there has been a nucleus of locally or nationally influential, knowledgeable, and articulate, people to take a lead in forming ad hoc pressure groups.⁴³

The very different nature of sight loss in comparison to some of the learning disabilities has meant that blind and partially sighted individuals have played a leading role in society, and have promoted the cause of education for blind people. In the nineteenth century, Dr. Armitage, founder of the British and Foreign Blind Society, and Henry Fawcett, postmaster-general in Gladstone's second administration, used their resources to further such educational developments.⁴⁴

As Armitage and Fawcett were men who lost their sight later in life, when they were already established in positions of influence, they do not necessarily disprove some of the judgements made about the powerlessness of the disabled through history.⁴⁵ Cook, Swain and French, as writers looking from a Social Model of Disability perspective, have claimed that, 'If there is a dominant common story, it is of subjugation in a context of unequal power relations between disabled and non-disabled people'.⁴⁶ Catherine J. Kudlick, who has adopted more of the post-revisionist approach described in the next section, exploring links between the interdisciplinary fields of disability studies, public health and gender history, has presented disability as a social category and has argued that it therefore should be viewed in terms of an exploration of power relationships.⁴⁷ However, Richard J.

Altenbaugh, in his study of the 'impact of polio on sites of learning', has asserted that disabled people have been 'historical actors', and have not taken the usually projected 'passive role'.⁴⁸ This thesis seeks to question whether the education of visually impaired children demonstrates that blind people were lacking the authority to determine developments.

A nuanced historical study can also assess whether some of the language used to criticise special schooling for blind children is the result of 'presentism'. 'Isolated provision' in boarding schools has been presented by writers influenced by the Social Model of Disability perspective as part of the separation of the disabled from normal society.⁴⁹ Certainly, the 'Colonies' set up for the 'feeble-minded' in the early twentieth century were set up to cut off their residents from the community, but this cannot be seen as the only possible parallel for schools educating those with sensory impairments.⁵⁰ Boarding was seen in the inter-war years as beneficial for public school pupils who were being prepared to be part of the elite.⁵¹ Having complete control of a boy's life was presented as 'a much more effective instrument of intellectual attainment and character moulding than a day school'.⁵² The schools for the 'elite' made great play of the grandeur of their facilities, and, as part of their development, often moved out of town centres, as was the case with Shrewsbury School in the nineteenth century.⁵³ This could provide an alternative explanation for the locations acquired for the permanent sites of the secondary schools established at Worcester and Chorleywood.

Another area of debate significant for this thesis is the role of non-governmental organisations. From the 1920s, both the schools studied were under the full or partial control of a national charity, the National Institute for the Blind (the NIB). While

traditional Whiggish historians have tended to consider that the 'national framework' established with the creation of the Welfare State ended the policy-initiating role of charities. Social Model of Disability writers have seen these organisations as self-serving and working to preserve the hierarchy of society.⁵⁴ Increased questioning of State provision in the last thirty years has led historians such as Gordon Phillips to adopt a 'guarded, but not unsympathetic view' of the charities involved in assisting blind people.⁵⁵ He stresses the diversity of type, aim and method of philanthropic organisations.⁵⁶ The relationship that grew with the State into the 1920s, Phillips has seen as being 'never clearly defined or agreed'. He, therefore, considers that any assumption of a 'mixed economy of welfare' with a 'co-existence of different suppliers meeting a variety of needs' does not allow for the 'confusion and uncertainty' that existed.⁵⁷ Central and local government was becoming more involved in schooling which raises the question of whether the situation in education was as unclear when the NIB was also expanding its influence.

This thesis seeks to further the work done on the education of disabled children by writers such as Copeland and Altenbaugh and produce a fine-grained study, getting away from the problems which can result from a narrow approach, such as that of Tomlinson's neo-Marxism, which makes inherent assumptions in an attempt to promote a particular theory.⁵⁸

1.2 Exploring the nexus between class, disability and gender

An affirmation of the advantages of adopting a more nuanced approach to the history of special education has been evident in the development of post-revisionist writing which has sought to employ 'an eclectic array of social science theories, concepts and research methods' in order to demonstrate the 'complex, subtle and often contradictory relationship

of education and society'.⁵⁹ Felicity Armstrong has asserted the need to produce an 'effective history' by 'eschewing generalities and simplifications'.⁶⁰ In trying to make sense of the complexities of 'the irrational, contradictory and inconsistent ideas upon which policy and practice were established and persisted with' in the period up to 1914, Copeland has used the ideas of Bourdieu and Weber to look at status and the process of social and cultural 'reproduction of a set of relative advantages and disadvantages'.⁶¹

Armstrong has taken a negative view of the consequences of special education, utilising Foucault's ideas to show how 'power embedded in professional knowledge and practices has been ... the bedrock of special education and the processes and procedures surrounding identification, categorization, labelling and treatment'. She considers 'humanitarian discourses' have been used to 'usher in and embellish policies of removal and confinement' and the 'production of [a] self-disciplinary, self-regulatory citizenry' which again raises questions for this thesis regarding the nature of 'enabling' education for adult life.⁶² Nevertheless, her identification of 'a set of contradictory processes, events and values' which make the 'future unpredictable' not only brings in the possibility of a role for individual agency, but also highlights the importance of examining the manner in which other events, such as the Second World War, have worked to transform attitudes, providing disabled people with opportunities otherwise denied to them.⁶³

Traditional and radical revisionist accounts have failed to allow, or even denied, that other factors can influence individual identity as well as affecting developments. The more complex picture which has emerged from post-revisionist writers has been supported by debates within Disability Studies. Tom Shakespeare has questioned the Social Model of Disability, focusing on the individual experience of some impairments, promoting

consideration of the manner in which the daily medical effects can be disabling but also encouraging exploration of other differences of experience relating to social status and gender.⁶⁴ Vernon has stressed the problems of those whom she described as “multiple Other”:

Impairment which is a precondition of disability, settles upon anyone, but the effect on any individual is very largely modified, minimised or exacerbated by who that person is in terms of their ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, age and class.⁶⁵

Significantly for this thesis, Shakespeare’s work on ‘disability identity’ has suggested that ‘class and gender are better predictors of ... career pattern and income than ... impairment’.⁶⁶

Even when acknowledging the influence of class, historians such as Borsay have not considered all possible parallels there could be with the impact of class on mainstream education.⁶⁷ Special schools for blind children have traditionally been treated as if they worked in very similar ways to each other. In the first forty years of the twentieth century, Worcester College for boys and Chorleywood College for girls were operating as fee-paying public schools before becoming grammar schools as a result of the 1944 Education Act. This meant that they were going to be targeted primarily at the upper and middle classes rather than the working classes. In his studies of mainstream practice, Gary McCulloch has sought to ‘rescue ... the black-coated worker from the enormous condescension of history’, highlighting the important part schooling played for the ‘anxious classes’ in preserving what they perceived as their threatened status.⁶⁸ He has demonstrated

the 'basic division of the middle classes' which he has seen as clear in the 'survival of the public schools ... and the grammar schools'.⁶⁹ This thesis aims to assess whether these secondary schools for blind children were not only utilising social class in an enabling manner which takes them beyond the assumed models by which special education operated, but also adapting to the new post-1944 realities in order to ensure their expansion.

In addition, both of these schools need to be assessed according to mainstream perceptions of gender. Recent sociologically-based work has highlighted the impact which the existence of a hegemonic masculinity had in subordinating groups which failed, or were unable to, conform.⁷⁰ Boys' schools needed to work against such potential disadvantage and Christine Heward has assessed the means by which 'a fundamental and interiorised set of assumptions' were used at Ellesmere College to turn 'boys ... into men at home and school'.⁷¹ In the field of Disability Studies, an awareness of such pressures has led to a call from Steve Robertson for the exploration of the 'gendered nature of the experiences of disabled men' as they had to deal with perceptions of male physical capabilities.⁷² At Worcester College such external pressures could influence the nature of the curriculum and the manner in which the boys were being prepared for adult life.

For the girls of Chorleywood College notions of gender roles could have an even more powerful influence. As Felicity Hunt has demonstrated education was perceived as determined by the needs of boys and whenever girls' needs conflicted with those of boys, those requirements were seen as 'deviant'.⁷³ Cole and Rose have assumed that intelligent blind girls were being given opportunities on a par with the boys of Worcester College.⁷⁴ If gender was playing a role restricting other girls' secondary schools, this raises the

question of whether some of the perceived 'weaknesses' in educational standards at Chorleywood, mentioned by Pritchard and Payne, could be better understood if they were evaluated in the light of the education provided for all young people at the time?⁷⁵

As an academic working in the 'border country between anthropology, sociology and educational research', Sara Delamont has described the pressures facing the non-special girls' secondary schools in the early twentieth century as resulting in a 'double conformity'.⁷⁶ In order to assert their academic prowess, the early schools for girls had to adopt the male curriculum, but they also had to be seen to conform to ideas of lady-like behaviour. Only in this way could the early educators of girls deal with the prejudices which existed against women's education, and the supposed accompanying dangers to women's reputations.⁷⁷ In an age when women's rights were only starting to emerge, any girls' school had to be careful of the image it presented, as they were answerable to the patriarchal influence of men in dominant positions of authority; as will be discussed in Chapter Five, the role of the men of the NIB would mean that Chorleywood College would not be immune to this pressure.⁷⁸

When assessing the education of blind children, a more involved picture needs to be developed. The full complexities of advantage, as well as disadvantage, have not been assessed when considering the factors influencing the schooling of this group. This thesis aims to use case study to weigh up the manner in which a variety of societal and cultural factors have linked with disability to affect developments. Education cannot be viewed simply in terms of disabling or enabling.

1.3 Using the Evidence: Triangulating a History from above and below

When coming to consider the methodology for looking at the social context of the education of blind children, I have considered the fact that radical revisionist and post-revisionist writers have criticised the limited scope of the research of some of the previous studies. Felicity Armstrong has described Pritchard's book as a classic work but also saw his use of legislation, official reports, conference proceedings, books and articles as a possible example 'of what Foucault referred to as "history as that which transforms documents into monuments"'.⁷⁹ The fact that the 'traditional' progressive view was able to dominate in educational history has been seen by proponents of the Social Model of Disability as the consequence of the way that:

Histories of segregated schooling are, for the most part, the official histories of non-disabled people and professionals, documenting such things as changing numbers, and types of schools and official rationales for changing policies.⁸⁰

Ted Cole and Gillian Sutherland based their conclusions largely on the study of government policy and statements made at conferences by educators and in their professional organisations. As a result, Cole has perceived that developments were a result of 'pragmatic' responses, while Sutherland has seen a 'retreat' by central Government in the inter-war period.⁸¹ Payne also used some institutional records, but could make only a limited attempt to assess the utility of the education beyond discussing the problems of a society which provided professionally-qualified blind people with few opportunities for employment.⁸²

The aim with this thesis has been to adopt the approach to qualitative research promoted by Marshall and Rossman, using 'triangulation' by 'bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point'.⁸³ In order to create a fine-grained picture of the education at schools for the blind, a variety of primary sources from 'above' and 'below' are brought together to 'illuminate the research in question'.⁸⁴ This kind of breadth in the utilisation of sources has been used to fill in some of the 'silences' in the history of the classroom identified by Grosvenor, Lawn and Rousmaniere.⁸⁵ Ulla Johansson has considered that, by combining a series of interviews with official and unofficial written sources in her study of elementary schooling in northern Sweden, she has been able to bring the 'human beings' back into educational history.⁸⁶ More recently Stephanie Burley has seen her work 'enhanced by extensive use of differing sources'; her use of written, visual and oral sources has resulted in a 'multi-faceted response' which has allowed her to assess the 'Silences and images in an Australian Catholic school history'.⁸⁷

For this thesis, evidence from 'above', including the variety of 'official' sources produced by Government, professional organisations and charities, can provide a clear context for a detailed study of the nature of the education provided in the special schools. Official letters and reports of inspectors are used in all of the chapters which focus on the two schools to give indications of the views of the leaders of supervising institutions and governing bodies, as well as an insight into the pressures and constraints faced by the staff of the institutions. Obviously, inspectors' visits to the schools were comparatively fleeting and can reflect the prejudices of the individuals. Equally, governing bodies depended largely on the head teachers' reports and were rarely involved in the day-to-day running of the schools. However, they do provide an insight into the external pressures, as well as an indication of some of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum adopted.

Written sources from schools can tend to present the public face of the establishment. Resources which have been kept often reflect the supervision and administration of the establishment. The case study chapters will use the variety of other resources available, including school magazines, prospectuses and photographs. School magazines provide a chronicle of sporting and cultural activities as well as academic achievements but were designed as a means of celebration for staff, students and parents acting, as Mangan has suggested, as a 'vehicle of institutional propaganda'.⁸⁸ The magazines of the schools studied do differ in their tone, but they were produced under the supervision of members of staff and do present the official record. This is as inevitable for the special schools as for the public schools Mangan was studying. However, boys who were former editors and sub-editors of the Worcester College magazine, *The Pimpernel*, suggest that there was no direct censorship and interference. Copy was seen but students could not recall an occasion when content was substantially altered for anything but stylistic purposes.⁸⁹

Photographs are another source for potential study which require careful analysis if they are to be used as anything beyond mere illustration. Margolis has warned that meaning is dependent on the intent of the photographer, the technology, the image and viewer because 'Visual images are evidence of human productive activity, worked matter, and as such their use is governed by socially established symbolic codes'.⁹⁰ Those that have been retained in the school archives, or used as illustrations in publications, have tended to be of specially staged, or 'significant', events. Schools such as Worcester College and Chorleywood College were initially dependent on fees being paid by parents, and then by the Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Long-term survival made the preservation and cultivation of image particularly important. Margolis excluded the typical team groups because they

showed little as ‘Sports teams reproduce competition and cooperation’.⁹¹ For this thesis such photographs with their use of the ‘codes’ have an additional symbolism. A deliberately posed photograph such as Illustration 1-A, with its echoes of the typical public school rowing crew, provides an indication of the manner in which Worcester College was breaking free of the expected special school model (see Chapter Three for the importance of rowing in the presentation of the College for Boys). Photographs have therefore been useful in providing an insight into priorities as well as their approach to marketing and presentation.



Illustration 1-A: A rowing four with the headmaster outside the Worcester College boathouse, c. 1923.⁹²

An additional dimension of the problem of ‘official’ control of the record in a study of blind children is the fact that the surviving school records are print-based or visual; this

creates difficulties when it is considered that the 1930s to 1950s was an era when all students, including those with some vision, used Braille as their working medium. When Chorleywood pupils visited places of interest in England and abroad, hand-written note books were produced, recording events and describing what was seen. They were designed for school use, as well as perhaps parental viewing, and were obviously written by staff rather than students.⁹³

The subsequent histories of the two schools have affected the nature of what remains for study. In 1987, the schools 'merged' to become RNIB New College Worcester on the site of Worcester College for the Blind.⁹⁴ Some Worcester College student files have survived, but, as with much of the other material, what was kept has been somewhat haphazard. With the Chorleywood site being sold, a more systematic policy was adopted with regard to what should be preserved. Photographs, magazines and assorted memorabilia were sent to the RNIB, but former teachers recall the headmistress of the time, Peggy Markes, ordering files to be put on a bonfire.⁹⁵

Memoirs have been published by some staff and students which has enabled some 'triangulation' of sources, but the thesis also attempts to get around the potential weaknesses of evidence through developing contacts with the former student association. Ex-pupils of Chorleywood College and Worcester College for the Blind have played an invaluable role in providing access to a broader range of written and visual sources, as well as the occasional resource in Braille. Members of the Former Students' Association email forum have been willing to answer queries, and a number of others have been formally interviewed to allow the acquisition of an alternative perspective on the education they received.

This study aims to produce a more complete study by triangulating sources from the supervising and governing authorities, with those produced by the school, as well as marrying this with the accounts of former students. By placing sources in the political, social and cultural context, the subjectivity of the evidence is used to assess the motivations of all the key players; this allows the creation of a nuanced history of the influences upon the schools as well as the impact upon the education of blind children nationally.

1.4 Incorporating Oral history

The use of documentary history has provided ‘the elemental raw materials’ which can ‘generate a sense of authenticity’, but this has been complemented by the use of interviews.⁹⁶ Oral history can assist in the goal of achieving, what Tosh has described as the purpose of history, the ‘re-creation and explanation’ of the past.⁹⁷ For studies of the history of education, such as that by Cunningham and Gardner on student teachers, oral history has assisted in ‘uncovering or illuminating a neglected corner of the past.’⁹⁸ Humphries found conducting interviews useful for a study of working-class youth as *Hooligans or Rebels* as he has been able to dismantle the ‘theoretical prejudice and depersonalizing imagery’ surrounding this particular group.⁹⁹ Oral history can play an equally important role when studying special education. Perks has perceived that in many of the traditional studies on the work of policy-makers and educationalists ‘disabled’ people have been ‘marginalised’, hidden from historical accounts of the services which were created for them.¹⁰⁰ French has interviewed people with a visual impairment as a result of a belief that ‘Oral history ...goes some way to achieving democracy in the

production of historical knowledge' and admitted that such a study 'challenges any simplistic analysis of the education of disabled people'.¹⁰¹

For a study of two schools, triangulating evidence through the use of oral history provides opportunities for nuanced insights. Read and Walmsley describe oral history as a means to 'amplify' and 'challenge' the historical account.¹⁰² This makes it a useful historical methodology for dealing with the potential weaknesses of both the traditional and radical revisionist interpretations of developments. Counce has pointed out that the result of interviews completed on the 'experience of disability' has been to make those who worked in service provision 'disturbed and upset', but asserts,

If the things they have to say make us uncomfortable, that is all the more reason for listening closely and trying to set things right for the future.If we are to understand the way our society works, we must look at its victims and at those required to make sacrifices as well as at those who do well.¹⁰³

However, although the use of oral history has obvious advantages in providing illustrations for the study of a period within living memory, there are inherent dangers in the methodology which have made its use the subject of much debate amongst historians. The nature of the interview relationship has led to criticism. Grele has highlighted the problems surrounding the way that people can be selected, and put themselves forward, for interview; often they will be chosen because they typify the process which is the determined subject of the study and very often it will be the more successful, and more confident, who will be willing to be interviewed.¹⁰⁴ Also, the historian provides the initial

structure and can impose through their questioning the values of a different age. Equally the undirected interview can lead to 'a stream of reminiscences and memories flowing in uninterrupted and seemingly unrelated fashion'.¹⁰⁵ These can often have the air of polished stories which have been frequently retold.¹⁰⁶

Oral history can certainly present the historian with a challenge, particularly when it is used to study events which took place over fifty years ago. Forgetting memories is not the major problem:

The difficulty lies in the fact that memory does not constitute pure recall; the memory of any particular event is refracted through layer upon layer of subsequent experience and through the influence of the dominant and/or local and specific ideology.¹⁰⁷

Given the nature of the debate about special education in recent years, memories could be influenced in either a positive or a negative manner. Former students may compare their education with the increased opportunities available to their children and blame the school itself. Equally, with neither College still existing in its original form, it could also create a feeling that the memory of the former school needs to be defended. This is particularly true of recollections relating to Chorleywood College. At the time of the merger, there was considerable debate about where the new school would be located and some former students openly expressed their opposition to the planned closure of the girls' school.¹⁰⁸ Hilda Turner, one of Chorleywood's first pupils in the 1920s, not only felt that the decision was "wrong", but even suggested that Worcester College should be closed instead:

Other ships have been moored for a very long time,
They are older by far than our own,
Please, committee think deeply! For they should go first,
And this closure we cannot condone.¹⁰⁹

Such evidence can demonstrate affection for, and therefore the value of, the school, but also could be influenced by a feeling of nostalgia, which can only be judged in the light of other materials.

This study also has to consider an additional variable which has been seen where oral history techniques have been used. Historians have noted that women often appear to remember the past in different ways to men. Etter-Lewis has shown how women's narratives are more liable to be characterised by 'understatements, avoidance of the first person point of view, rare mention of personal accomplishments and disguised statements of personal power'.¹¹⁰ This has to be considered when interviewing women educated in an age when deference was expected, but again some of the balance present in judgements made by former students who have gone on to play a role in service provision has suggested that this was not too great an issue for a study which also uses written sources to enable evaluation.

The aim of this thesis is not to produce an oral history of the schools, as some oral histories, whilst helping to balance the picture, do not attempt to incorporate the context of events and lose some of the broader awareness of underlying factors that documentary evidence can provide. Instead, in the manner utilised by Cunningham and Gardner, the purpose of seeking these accounts is to 'place the evidence of one category of historical

sources under the scrutiny of another and quite different category'.¹¹¹ Here oral history presents particular opportunities for a study of the education of blind children; as Grele has demonstrated, the 'interviewing process can reveal the contradiction between ideology, myth and reality'.¹¹²

1.5 Producing a case study of two schools for blind children

For these case studies of Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges, the use of both oral and written sources is influenced by my own position. I can be seen as an 'insider' as I teach at the successor school, and, as is pointed out by McCulloch in his discussion of the origins and nature of many school histories, this presents a number of dangers which could undermine an attempt to produce an objective and useful historical account.¹¹³ However, the thesis did not emerge from any desire of the school authorities for the production of a 'prize day history'; there has been no desire to 'celebrate...growth and successes'.¹¹⁴ The work has been done as a result of my initiative and desire to produce an historical analysis, with no expectations as far as the argument has been concerned; nobody in school has asked to read, or been offered any access, to any drafts.

The level of independence I have been allowed does come from the fact that when the single-sex and selective Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges merged, they were both formally closed and the new school, initially RNIB New College Worcester, became co-educational and non-selective. I joined the school several years after the closure of the boys' and girls' schools so I have no personal allegiance to the former establishments, as has been the case for all members of the senior leadership team during the time I have been writing. The level of freedom I had to work as an historian was increased by the separation in 2007 from the governing charity, the Royal National Institute of the Blind, to create an

independent non-maintained special school. For a study of the schools from 1920 to 1958, I have therefore been working as an 'outsider', looking at an education which bears no relation to my own experience as a teacher at New College and in mainstream education, or as a former pupil of a co-educational Cardiff comprehensive: in terms of Justine Mercer's definition of the insider/outsider dichotomy as a continuum, 'time, location, participants and topic' have moved me into the realm of the 'outsider'.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, as a History teacher who has taken a great interest in the preservation of the school archive, I have benefited from a certain level of the 'trust' seen as typical of an 'insider'.¹¹⁶ This has placed me in a privileged position of being able to access Governors' minutes and student files. However, this trust has not been linked to assurances I have given on the suppression of potentially embarrassing information for the schools, but on my professionalism in approaching matters relating to personal details on former students. I applied to the Principal for permission to use otherwise restricted material on students who had left over fifty years ago, and the only stipulation was my agreement to be governed by the same guarantees which were required by the Birmingham Royal Institute for the Blind when I accessed their materials at the Birmingham City Archive. As a consequence of these ethical concerns, all footnotes relating to former students which have been based on personal files and the minutes of school governors have been kept anonymous.

My position as a qualified teacher of the visually impaired has brought certain advantages in relation to understanding Braille and other working methods used by visually impaired people. These insights have helped me as an interviewer of former students. However,

I am aware that oral history is 'always critically influenced by, perhaps fundamentally shaped by, a conspiring interlocutor wearing the guise of objective historian'.¹¹⁷ Formulating the questions I am 'implicated in the generation ofdata' and this could create additional issues relating to the fact that the former students are aware that I am a teacher from a successor school.¹¹⁸ However, many of the interviewees had gone onto professional careers, a number in social work and the Law, as well as five who had done some teaching, so with the time that has passed and the very different nature of the new school, I do not feel that my presence played an undue role in influencing the comments made.

The British Educational Research Association Revised guidelines (2004) have been used when interviewing former students and recording information from school files and the NCWFSA email forum. When interviewing, I have been helped by the fact that I have been working with adults able to judge what they wished to say and have recorded. As I was using the interviews to triangulate information with other sources, I tried to give the former students as much control of the interview as possible. I ensured that there was voluntary informed consent by telling them in advance of the purpose of my research and the nature of the questions I would be asking. Former students were allowed to suggest a suitable time and method for the discussion (either through a visit or by telephone). Initial attempts to produce a complete account of everything said caused some discomfort with older interviewees who felt that they did not want such a record to be kept. As a result I made notes and then sent a copy to the interviewee who was allowed to make any alterations before signing the final copy. Some former students were uncomfortable with their names being quoted so, in order to respect their privacy, all former students are only listed by first name, and, where requested, anonymity has been permitted through changing

the name (although the dates they were at the schools is included in the Bibliography and other Sources).

Any selection of former students for interview is, perhaps inevitably, largely a result of chance. Some of them were approached at the former students' reunion, whilst others came as a result of a recommendation by someone already interviewed or through the former students' email forum. Arguably those who attend reunions, or who are still in contact with the school, would be those whose experience was more positive, but the assessments used in Chapters Nine and Ten demonstrate that this was not necessarily the case. Instead my position within a successor school has given me privileged access to oral as well as written accounts which provide the material needed to produce case studies of schools for blind children. As Cunningham and Gardner realised for their own study of student-teachers:

Rather than reassuring ourselves of the relative soundness of our chosen data sources by picking holes in the quality of alternative sources, we would do better to be attuned to the dangers of unreliable, contrived or partial evidence wherever it raises its head and to be alert to strategies for minimising or countering it. It is precisely for this reason that the use of oral and written sources alongside each other ... commends itself as a particularly fruitful one.¹¹⁹

Case studies of Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges can be considered to be intrinsic as the two schools were different from other schools for the blind in offering a secondary, and

then a grammar, education. Detailed examination of two establishments does allow this thesis to contribute to the work done by post-revisionist writers showing the manner in which factors such as class and gender have worked with disability. However, the nature of the development of the movement towards 'inclusion' allows the case studies to have a broader contribution to an assessment of the impact of society and what constitutes an enabling education.

Richard Aldrich has also highlighted the manner in which the 'examination of relationships [between public and independent education] which has occurred at other points in time has the potential to enhance and reconfigure the nature of the current public/private debate'.¹²⁰ Both schools in this study were set up to be fee-paying but gained grants and students funded by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), and then a position within the structure established by the 1944 Education Act. The role of the State changed through the first half of the twentieth century, but a study of special education can also show the significance of non-governmental organisations such as charities. In addition, this thesis can contribute to an understanding of the evolving position between non-maintained special schools and LEAs. David Parker's account of *Hertfordshire Children in War and Peace 1914-39* does discuss secondary schooling while focusing mainly on elementary education, but, while there are references to special education, there is no mention of Chorleywood College.¹²¹

As has been shown by Armstrong, Altenbaugh and Copeland, a study of developments within one area of special education can challenge preconceptions of the nature of disability and the role of a range of complex factors. This can also have implications for the study of the development of mainstream education.

1.6 Creating the broader picture for case studies on the education of blind children

Pritchard has stated that 'Educational and social trends are followed, not created, by provision for the handicapped', but the aim through this thesis is to consider the extent to which schooling at Worcester College and Chorleywood College did mimic some of these 'trends' and veered from society's expectations for the 'handicapped'.¹²² The sequence of chapters is designed to allow discussion of the continuities and changes within the two main debates which have been shown to exist around the history of special education - the motives and other factors influencing provision, and the extent to which the resulting education was having a 'disabling' or 'enabling' effect. In order to evaluate whether the history of the education of blind children demonstrates progress, social control or a haphazard combination of contributory factors, developments have initially been explored at the national level; this allows consideration of the broader social and cultural context impacting on individual schools. The following chapters then focus on the two case studies so that the nexus of individual agency with class, gender and disability can be explored.

The five chapters of Part One of the thesis focus on the situation from 1920 to 1944. This allows the consideration of the shifting involvement of local and national government and voluntary organisations in special education and its relation to secondary education in an era when such schooling was unavailable to most children, whether or not they were designated as disabled. Chapter Two starts the discussion at the national level in order to weigh up the causal factors operating after the First World War. The validity of some of the criticisms focused on the special schools for the blind can be assessed by examining the developments which shaped and impacted upon the opportunities available for the young

blind person. Early twentieth century reports made assumptions about the causes of disability, and it is necessary to evaluate their effect upon blind children. Also, economic retrenchment and the influence of eugenics were creating constraints within which special schools would have to work in the immediate post-war period and into the Great Depression.

In order to explore the differences of motivation underlying special education, one of the themes of the thesis is the applicability of a 'pecking order' of disability. In Chapter Two, this begins with an assessment of the comparative advantages of blind people against those with other physical and learning disabilities. The work of influential individuals alongside the impact of war were operating to widen the openings for employment and advancement, but the significance of these changes needs to be evaluated, as do the differences within the power and opportunities available to different groups of blind people. The role played by a number of blind men in the development of the secondary schools for the blind in the twentieth century is introduced before it is then developed at a case study level in Chapters Three and Five.

Having established in Chapter Two the level of constraint which national attitudes and policies represented for the secondary education of blind children, the rest of Part One consists of two case studies of schools in the era before the 1944 Education Act. Chapters Three and Four focus on Worcester College for the Blind, the secondary school for boys. They assess the extent to which the standard model of presentation and curriculum for a special school was ignored as the school tried to provide an education comparable with the academic elite in mainstream education. Chapter Three evaluates the impact of individual agency against external pressures at a time when the role of the State and national charities

were changing. Chapter Four then examines the extent to which the resulting education could be said to have been 'enabling' in preparing the pupils to function effectively as adult citizens.

In discussing the major theme of the impact of special schools as enabling or disabling, assessment of the level to which students were being prepared for successful inclusion into adult life has to be integral. Analysis is completed with reference to the criticisms made by writers influenced by the Social Model of Disability; the schools are considered in terms of the extent to which they worked to remove from the 'disabled' individual the barriers which the attitudes, policies and practices of society had created. In order to do this the definition of Citizenship put forward by Drake has been a useful starting point:

The notion of citizenship is central to explaining the inclusion or exclusion of disabled people from society as a whole.... To be a citizen is to be able to take part in the decisions that create or re-create the contours of a society, and to be able to participate in key functions such as work, leisure, political debate, travel and religious observance.¹²³

In terms of education, this has to be judged in terms of whether the school was providing the opportunity to gain comparable academic qualifications as a path to employment, as well as the social skills and cultural capital to live independently and gain acceptance in adult life.

This division of the case study chapters between a discussion of the influences leading to the school's establishment and development and an assessment of the extent to which the education was enabling is also followed in Chapters Five and Six which scrutinise Chorleywood College for girls. However, this school was chosen as a contrast to allow an examination of the extent to which gender must be considered as a determining influence in disability history, and again the study seeks to explore comparisons with mainstream experience. The Girls' Public Schools were constrained by the association of any attempt to tailor a curriculum around alternative priorities with inferiority. Chapter Five will evaluate the extent to which such pressures impacted on a secondary school for blind girls, with Chapter Six focusing on the resulting curriculum and its delivery.

Having appraised the position in the inter-war period, Part Two aims to evaluate the level of continuity and change which resulted from the 1944 Education Act; developments are examined through the following fourteen years until the retirement of Bradnack, the headmaster of Worcester College, in 1958. Although historians of disability have suggested some alterations in provision as a result of the Act, there has been little discussion of the factors which affected the particular shape of education for blind children in the immediate post-war era and this is the basis for the discussion in Chapter Seven. The Government files on the 'reorganisation of schools for the blind' enable the consideration of the role of vested interests and rivalries, as well as the consequences of the official desire for the special education of the blind to follow the tripartite model used for mainstream education.

The remaining three chapters consider the impact which new definitions of secondary education had on opportunities of pupils at Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges as they became grammar schools for the blind. The State had extended free secondary education

to all students beyond the age of eleven deemed 'educable', but the tripartite system which was established has been seen by historians of mainstream provision such as Barber as doing 'little to challenge the prevailing culture' which could leave disabled students with the same level of restricted opportunities.¹²⁴ An interrogation of the class background of students can allow the impact of increased state funding to be assessed. Again the impact of class and gender, as well as the agency of individuals are explored in order to evaluate whether these factors continued to play a more prominent role than many studies of disability have recognised. Finally, Chapters Nine and Ten scrutinise curriculum developments so that an assessment can be made of the extent to which the grammar schools were pioneering and enabling.

1.7 Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to add to the understanding of how special schooling for blind children and adolescents developed in the twentieth century. By examining the years before and after the 1944 Education Act, the importance of an event which has been considered a major turning point in State provision can be scrutinised. The extent to which there was a tale of 'progress' can be questioned to show the complexities of the factors and experiences which affected the education of blind people.

Nevertheless, in utilising a post-revisionist perspective, it is not only the traditional 'progressive' view that will be examined critically. The pursuit of a 'common dominant story' in much of the recent sociologically-based writing has made underpinning assumptions which would appear to deny some of the historical reality of unequal power relations between, and within, some groups of disabled people. This thesis seeks to challenge any narrow presupposition that disability, or in this case blindness, was the only

determinant of educational experience. Through an analysis of a broad range of sources, the aim is to produce an historical study which incorporates the broader social and cultural influences that affected the development of the secondary schools for the blind. This will then enable the nexus of class and gender with disability to emerge as part of a more fine-grained and involved picture.

1.8 References

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Part One: Education for Blind Children 1920 – 1944

2. A 'Disabling' Society? The National Context for a Case Study of Education for the Blind

Writers such as Borsay and Tomlinson who have examined the development of special education would tend to agree with the view promoted by Weinberg in his study of the English public schools that, '[T]he history of education so far has been the attempt to produce an elite at the expense of the rest of the population'.¹ They have asserted that 'segregated' schooling works with the rest of society in ensuring that control continued to be maintained by the existing upper classes.² Tomlinson has viewed the direction taken by special education in the inter-war years as being dominated by a 'strategic power-play' between educational and medical personnel, but this raises questions about the relative power and dominant ideas within these groups, as well as whether blind people had no voice themselves.³ Therefore, before the case studies allow an examination of the developments within the two schools, this chapter focuses on prevailing perceptions of disability and their impact on the nature of Government policy as well as the contribution of voluntary organisations.

Before the First World War, the State had taken a role in ensuring that the blind and deaf, unlike the 'feeble-minded', were provided with elementary schooling delivered by certificated teachers, but the Government had not acted to promote access to secondary schools. The 1920 Blind Persons Act and the 1921 Education Act confirmed the state's position in the provision of education and welfare for the blind.⁴ For writers such as Cole, these developments are indications of progress during the inter-war years towards a more humanitarian approach, with Government 'gathering knowledge and experience of the needs of the handicapped'.⁵ However, although the State can be seen to have made some

efforts to enable blind people to gain help, education and care, children's segregation into 'special' education has been presented by Tomlinson as part of an exclusion from the 'occupational success, social mobility, privilege and advancement' which are 'legitimated by the education system'.⁶ Borsay agrees that the 'vested interests' of medical and educational professionals were working in the 1920s and 1930s to further their own interests and prevent blind people from becoming a burden on national resources.⁷

The all-encompassing nature of the revisionist criticisms of Tomlinson and Borsay ignores the manner in which the authorities behind some schools for the blind were working within the constraints of the time to advantage their students. In his study of developments in the education of the 'backward pupil from 1870 to 1914, Copeland has argued that,

The decisions which relate to policies for education and special schools are taken within the parameters presented by a much wider social context. Hence, the players tend to play the hand they have been dealt, rather than to ask whether the cards or the game could be changed.⁸

The 1920s and 1930s remained a challenging environment for professionals working in special education. There were substantial obstacles linked to social attitudes and the earlier part of this chapter will assess the many disadvantages created by views of impairments. Nevertheless, Government was becoming willing to provide some assistance, and the case studies of Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges assess the positive perceptions of ability upon which the staff were to try to capitalise. The second section will focus on whether blind people were higher in what can be seen as a 'pecking order' of disability.⁹ Blind men

were among a number of people who will be shown to have used their position to provide some assistance to blind children able to take advantage of the opportunities of secondary education. The nature and origins of the relative advantages for advancement possessed by some blind children compared to other 'handicapped' groups can only be scrutinised in the context of the broader developments of the inter-war period.

2.1 The Constraints of Perceptions in the Inter-War Years

For all the claims of progress that traditional historians such as Cole have made for the inter-war period, Payne has considered that the positive developments and optimism evident among the educators of the educable blind in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had turned to pessimism by the early 1920s.¹⁰ Under the 1921 Education Act, the Government had established five categories of disability and had made the LEAs responsible for ensuring that a blind child stayed at school until the age of sixteen, at a time when reform was only extending education for the majority of young people until the age of 14.¹¹ However, blindness did still limit the opportunity which this education provided. Although the Act had asserted that the children identified had to receive differentiated provision albeit in special, certificated schools or classes, there was no guarantee to ensure that pupils could receive more than an elementary education, with all the disadvantages this will be shown to entail. There was no LEA secondary school which met the specific requirements of blind children, and willingness to assist with fees at Chorleywood and Worcester will be shown to have varied by authority. There was continuity and change in the social and cultural context as a result of the experience and effects of the First World War which created challenges for Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges.

For the two secondary schools for the blind, difficulties were linked to the negative assumptions that surrounded many disabled people in the inter-war period. Historians such as Humphries and Gordon have described the manner in which disability in the early twentieth century was 'surrounded by ignorance, fear and superstition', with additional problems caused by parents who were ashamed of the manner in which their offspring did not fit the image of 'muscular Christianity' which had been portrayed as the model in the late nineteenth century (an issue which will be discussed in the following chapters on Worcester College).¹² For blind people, the culture was influenced by historic perceptions of blindness as leading to 'helplessness, dependency and gullibility'.¹³ Blindness had often been seen as punishment for the sins of the individual or even their parents and ancestors.¹⁴ Portrayals in literature had continued to reinforce such prejudices by linking blindness with sin, or a 'state of ignorance and confusion, of the inversion of normal perceptions and values, and of a condition equal to if not worse than death'.¹⁵ Rudyard Kipling, the 1907 Nobel Prize winner for Literature, created a blinded hero who considers blindness a 'living death' and whose girlfriend deserts him as he is 'useless till the end of life'.¹⁶ Such attitudes were to continue into the fourth decade of the century. A newspaper front page of 1932 did remark on the 'keenness' of Worcester College boys for river sports but still considered them 'handicapped by one of Nature's greatest misfortunes'.¹⁷ In this cultural environment, the reaction of parents to the news that their child was blind and therefore 'disabled' was reported as being one of 'overwhelming despair' and a feeling that their child would 'grow up to be a nuisance to the family and a burden to itself'.¹⁸

Perceptions of the hereditary blind, and the lower classes in general, were not helped by the growth of interest in eugenics in the early years of the twentieth century. Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species*, with the ideas of 'natural selection' and the 'survival

of the fittest', had a broader impact and resulted in social implications being drawn; these included the beginning of a 'Eugenics' movement, which assessed the supposed requirements for the advancement of the human race.¹⁹ The writings of leading members of this movement such as Dr. Francis Galton stressed the importance of encouraging those with the most 'civic worth' to procreate, whilst restricting 'eugenically flawed unions'.²⁰ This was a doctrine in which an interpretation of 'nature' counted for more than nurture. Bad household management was considered to be the cause of malnutrition.²¹ For some of these eugenisists, public health reform was mistaken 'as rescuing the dregs risked ruining the race', and this provided an argument for conservative opponents of the Liberal reforms of the early century.²² When the Liverpool surgeon Robert Reid Rentoul discussed the *Proposed sterilization of Certain Mental and Physical Degenerates* in 1903, he started a debate in Britain on the sterilization of the 'congenitally inferior'.²³ Sterilization was considered to constitute 'unlawful wounding' under the 1861 Offence Against the Person Act, so the Eugenics Society started by campaigning for an Act which would permit voluntary sterilization with the aim of creating 'the eugenic conscience without which it would be impossible to tackle the larger problem of sterilising sub-normal carriers of defect'; their ideas influenced leading figures such as H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw and Winston Churchill.²⁴ The arguments of the Eugenics Education Society did contribute to the passing of the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 which increased the powers of authorities to place 'defectives' in special colonies, but opposition from the Catholic Church and Labour party was sufficient in 1931 to prevent legislation allowing sterilization.²⁵

Although the main emphasis for eugenists was the 'feeble minded', blind people did attract some attention, with Barrington and Pearson of the Galton Eugenics Laboratory claiming:

Defective physique including defective powers of sensation are we know closely correlated with defective mentality, they are both signs of an ultimate physical degeneracy. In many cases, no doubt, helping the vision will aid the intelligence but we cannot suppose that poor vision is the source of all the poor intelligence we find associated with it.²⁶

After a number of individual states in America enacted laws against 'feble-mindedness' and 'habitual criminals', 'negative eugenics' ideas were further promoted by the President of the American Ophthalmological Society, Lucien Howe, who called for marriage restrictions, segregation and even sterilization of the hereditary blind.²⁷ His paper on hereditary blindness was presented at the Second International Congress of Eugenics in 1921, and would certainly have been heard by delegates from Britain.²⁸ In the early 1930s, a British Ministry of Health Departmental Committee recommended the legalization of voluntary sterilization for three categories, including mental defectives, persons likely to transmit mental disorder, and persons suffering from a transmissible physical disability; hereditary blindness was considered an example of the latter.²⁹ A consultant in Leicester did persuade a group of blind men to be voluntarily sterilised for eugenic reasons.³⁰

Students at the secondary schools for the blind were not immune from the thinking encouraged by the debate. Discussions on the reproduction of hereditary conditions must have had some impact given the stress which the headmistress of Chorleywood College placed on, what she considered must have been, the responsible actions of former students when they planned to become mothers.³¹ Anecdotal evidence would also suggest that there

were members of the medical profession in the early years of the century who took a very negative view of the life of blind people. One eminent former student of Worcester College was to report that when he was diagnosed with cancer of the eyes at the age of one, his parents were told by a Harley Street surgeon that, while he could perform the necessary operation, the child would be blind, and he then stated that the baby could be given all the drugs he would need to keep him free from pain and that he would last about a year. The surgeon told the parents that he was certain that they would agree with the option he would take in similar circumstances; it was only as the family were leaving that they realised that the professional was recommending leaving their child to die.³²

However, eugenics did not dominate the discussion of the causes of blindness and the emphasis of both the 1917 Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind and the 1922 Report on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness was on the role of disease and infection (leading to changes whose implications are discussed in Chapter Seven).³³ Nevertheless, these reports did little to alter perceptions of blind people. Research aimed at reducing incidence often only served to highlight the prejudice of dominant social groups. Medical professionals tended to view blindness as a result of the ignorance and immorality of working class parents rather than promoting the link with poor housing and poor levels of general health in an era when many people could not afford regular medical care. The *British Journal of Nursing* in 1906 blamed consanguinity for blindness.³⁴ The report of the Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness in 1922 stressed the role of gonorrhoea and syphilis, as well as the association with 'poverty, food [and] dirt'.³⁵ Dr. Ritchie of the Royal London Society for Teaching and Training the Blind was to claim that in 1910 over 12,000 children owed their loss of sight to 'culpable carelessness on the part of those responsible for their welfare during the first week of life'.³⁶

Theories about disability and, in particular, the causes of blindness did put the general education of blind children at a disadvantage in a number of ways. The association with the working classes meant that the class perspectives of the early twentieth century affected blind people, as they did other groups of physically impaired. After the early century Liberal reforms had alleviated some of the hardship of working-class life, there was an assumption that continued problems were the fault of the parents and that children placed in 'segregated' settings should be grateful to have been 'saved from themselves'.³⁷ In the East Anglian elementary schools for the blind there were attempts to remove the children from what were perceived as undesirable outside influences and such prejudices were also evident among the decision-makers of the NIB.³⁸ When the Duchess of Bedford bought and donated a house in Chorleywood, this became the first NIB 'Sunshine Home' for young blind children. Although the aim was for these young children to be 'taught to grow up as normal human beings, and to treat their blindness as a handicap to be overcome', Mary Thomas has stated that these homes were targeted at those whose 'home conditions were unsatisfactory'.³⁹

At a time when notions of class dominated policy relating to the goals of education, the association of blindness with the working classes meant educational opportunities would be restricted. As was evident in the illustrations the NIB chose for an Annual Report in the 1930s [Illustration 2-A], the elementary education provided for the working classes was training children to carry out manual and basic clerical tasks effectively; it was an education for docility, not creating any broader expectations. In 1918, the Advisory Committee on the Blind recommended that in the elementary special schools 'not less than four hours of manual instruction must be given weekly to each child', and the skills

acquired should have 'some definite bearing on actual occupations'.⁴⁰ The 1920 Blind Persons' Act assumed that the most appropriate employment for blind people would be in sheltered workshops or as outworkers in projects administered by the training institutes for the blind. At a time of post-war economic recession, gaining additional funding for the secondary education of blind people was going to be difficult. When the historian Brian Simon came to look at policy-making in the inter-war years, he stressed the violent objection which came from capitalist industrialists to any measures requiring public expenditure that would have led to the improvement of working class education.⁴¹ Such opposition was to be strengthened by the financial pressures created by the immediate post-war slump and then the World Depression of the 1930s.



Illustration 2-A: Pictures included on the front cover of the National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1935-6.

The consequence of these perceptions was a society which was increasing the difficulties facing blind people. Sir Arthur Pearson, the president of the NIB, complained that there

was 'too much pity for their blindness and not enough sympathy for their human natures'.⁴²

He considered that, 'If you tell a man often enough he is afflicted he will become afflicted and will adopt the mental and physical attitude befitting that soul-destroying word'.⁴³ The problem was that in an era when voluntary organisations still played a key role, charities needed to create sympathy in order to gain the money required; the NIB used pictures of young blind boys (always known as 'Peter') on a range of 'propaganda', as they called their publicity, materials in the 1920's and 1930's (Illustration 2-B).



Illustration 2-B: 'Peter', a character used by the NIB on various publications.⁴⁴

The handicap which such assumptions about the abilities of blind people could represent was reflected in the judgements made by the blind American clinical psychologist, Thomas Cutsforth. In his influential book on *The Blind in School and Society*, first published in 1932, he asserted that many blind people were the victims of an approach in which they were 'set off from society and marked as "defectives"'.⁴⁵ He claimed that, '[u]nder the conditions imposed upon them by society' the blind would not be able to develop 'a strictly

normal personality'. The difficulty was in ensuring the 'social give and take that is required to produce the socially normal individual'.⁴⁶ He was very critical of the traditional education of the blind which was tailored towards 'the acquisition of special skills that are purposely selected because they lack complexity and because they involve a long period of deadening monotony of repetitious movement.'⁴⁷ Cutsforth also indicated the problems when the blind were given an academic education, but then restricted by society; when describing the work of Samuel Howe and the Perkins Institute in Massachusetts, he acknowledged that 'The blind were made to participate in the intellectual pursuits of their seeing brothers', but then claimed, 'The principles that Howe laid down have not helped in the least to free them from their social isolation, which may have been enhanced by the liberation of the intellect and the quickening of the senses.'⁴⁸

In 1930s Britain, the Report on the education of the partially sighted also highlighted the danger that a segregated education could produce a separate existence. The authors found that 'witnesses expressed the opinion that the admission of partially sighted children to a school for the blind creates a prejudice against the former which acts disadvantageously, particularly when the child at the age of sixteen enters the labour market'; they should only attend a school for the blind if they were going to live in the 'community of the blind'.⁴⁹ In the inter-war years, children with partial sight were at a disadvantage. There were difficulties for education authorities trying to make an accurate diagnosis in an era when large print text could not be easily created and blindness was defined as being 'too blind to be able to read the ordinary school books used by children'.⁵⁰ However, the concerns suggest that the cultural environment was working to exclude all children with a visual impairment from opportunities in adult life.

The disadvantage that such attitudes could represent for schools trying to 'enable' their students to take a full role in adult life was obvious in the difficulties blind people faced in finding employment. Although they found a high level of unemployment amongst all disabled people, Humphries and Gordon have concluded that the problems were even more severe for blind people; in 1936, during the Depression, 35,000 out of blind population of 40,000 were unemployed.⁵¹ The prejudice of employers, and their exploitation of the weak position of blind people, becomes evident in the journal of the College of Teachers of the Blind (CTB), a group formed to enable the 'advancement of the welfare of the blind through and by the advancement of the education of the blind'.⁵² One letter, from 1919, reported the problems of a group of highly skilled blind piano tuners who were paid fifteen shillings per week less than sighted workers doing the same job.⁵³ The worries of creating disappointed expectations, as a result of the 'unwillingness, the prejudice, and the hostility' of employers, led a blind 'home teacher' (the modern equivalent would be a rehabilitation officer) to ask, 'Is it advisable to train blind people for professional positions?'⁵⁴ His conclusion was that, 'It is better not to train a blind person at all than to offer him what appears to be wholesome bread, but which turns out to be a stone!'⁵⁵ The task was not going to be made any easier when officials such as E. N. Strong at the Board of Education believed that the ability of blind boys to gain a position outside the workshops had to be proven before they could be given the opportunity to gain a secondary education.⁵⁶

With these attitudes and assumptions being prevalent, the approach of Brown, the Headmaster of Worcester College was unusual, not only in its encouragement of the rights of all academically-able blind boys to gain a secondary education (see Chapters Three and Four), but also in his assertion that other blind children should have a secondary education beyond the age of twelve.⁵⁷ This suggests that all educators were not pessimistic about

possibilities in the inter-war period. Despite the handicap that social attitudes presented, blind people did possess advantages which allowed some 'disabled' children to gain access to secondary schooling.

2.2 Blind people in the 'Pecking Order'

When assessing special education, historians such as Borsay have acknowledged differences between types of impairment, but, coming from the perspective of the Social Model of Disability, they still suggest the 'common exclusion' of all 'disabled' groups from citizenship.⁵⁸ Government has been portrayed as containing the opposition of the disabled in the first half of the twentieth century and Tomlinson has been critical of the role played by the self-interest of professionals.⁵⁹ However, when the impact of the collective and individual agency of this disabled group are assessed, there are signs of a change in the position of the blind taking place in these years.⁶⁰ Unlike the 'backward' children studied by Copeland, blind people did have some relative advantages which reinforce the idea of a 'pecking order' of disability and militate against the view that they were simply dismissed.⁶¹ Gender historians, Goodman and Martin, have identified the manner in which some women were able to become a 'legitimate player of the game' of influence through access to cultural, social and economic capital, and some blind men were working through the possession of similar resources.⁶² Eminent individuals, many of whom had become blind when they had a position amongst the ruling classes gained through education and social position, will be shown to have played a part in encouraging the development of secondary education for the blind.

Compared with many other 'disabled' groups, blind people did have some advantages. In 1893, the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act had made school

attendance compulsory and enabled limited financial assistance to the boarding schools set up by voluntary bodies. For centuries, blind people had been associated with the 'deserving poor', and there was also a tradition of believing them closer to God.⁶³ Evidence of this kind of reaction can be seen in donations such as that given anonymously to the Birmingham Royal Institute for the Blind (BRIB) junior school at Lickey Grange, 'with the wish for God's Blessing upon the work for the blind children'.⁶⁴ By contrast, those perceived as 'feeble-minded' were less favourably treated due to apparent feelings of 'fear' and revulsion, problems relating to diagnosis and the issues surrounding their possible standards of education.⁶⁵

The advantage possessed by the blind and deaf in comparison with other disabled groups became evident in policy making in the 1920s when Wood, the Assistant Secretary to the Board of Education, was considering the need to cut back on expenditure:

It seems very desirable that if possible we should practice the necessary economies on the children whom it is least profitable or appropriate for the Board to maintain. If it is agreed that the Blind, the Deaf, the Crippled and the Delicate come first, then we must try to leave the schools for these children untouched and get our savings elsewhere.⁶⁶

Blind children were helped by the interest taken by Alfred Eichholz, the Chief Medical Inspector of the Board of Education, who was a progressive, opposing eugenics and believing in the importance of improving the social environment. He was to have considerable influence in the discussions of the Departmental Committee on the Causes

and Prevention of Blindness in 1922, and the Joint NIB/CTB Report on the Education of the Blind in the 1930s (see Chapter Seven).⁶⁷ As will be discussed in Chapter Five, he was to be of great assistance to Chorleywood College.

Also, the education of children who were deaf or blind was assisted by increased regulation of standards of teaching. The supervisors and teachers of students with sensory impairments had been active in organising to ensure their influence over the education of their charges. By 1908, both the supervising institutions for the deaf and the blind had formed their own 'Colleges' which were authorised by the Board of Education to monitor the examination of specialist teachers.⁶⁸ By 1923, the CTB was preparing to amalgamate with the Association of Teachers of the Blind. One of the aims was to 'raise the status of teachers of the blind' and this would appear to support Tomlinson's view of the creation of 'vested interests', but the CTB had been founded as the result of a suggestion of Eichholz when he was a HMI, and it also shared expertise and encouraged research, as well as liaising with government as a co-ordinated group.⁶⁹

In addition to the contribution of professionals, blind adults could be powerful advocates. 'Disability History' has begun to assert the significance of collective responses as a 'manifestation of agency' and blind workers in Britain were organising to assert their rights.⁷⁰ Although the main source of employment into the 1930s was in segregated workshops making baskets, brooms and mats, they did not passively accept their conditions. The National League of the Blind had been established in 1899 and affiliated to the Trades Union Congress in 1909. In 1920, they demonstrated in London to protest at the delay in introducing the provisions of the 1917 Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. As a result of this, and pressure from Sir Arthur Pearson, who had

met with a number of Government figures, a Blind Persons Act was passed within months.⁷¹

Pearson was a leading figure amongst the influential blind men who, with no professional position to preserve, were to have an impact on the form which special education, as well as welfare provision, was to take in the years after the First World War. His success with Ministers over the Blind Persons Act demonstrates how blind people did benefit from the fact that, contrary to much popular belief, congenital and adventitious blindness were not class specific. When Pearson lost his sight as a result of glaucoma in his forties, he had already gained financial security and social and cultural capital. As a journalist Pearson had founded the *Daily Express* and had been involved in philanthropic work through his Pearson Fresh Air Fund, which gave inner city children the opportunity to have a day in the countryside. Baden Powell valued Pearson's judgment as his publisher sufficiently to consult him when he first thought of Scouting, and he had played an important role in helping to promote the movement at its inception.⁷² Pearson's decision in 1913, on the confirmation of his prognosis, to devote his energies to charities for the blind, brought them a powerful force. He became the Treasurer, and then the first President, of the NIB, as well as becoming Chairman of the Worcester College Governors in 1920. Pearson used his position to put into practice his belief that for the blind, 'the more active, the more normal he can make his life, the happier he will be'.⁷³ His aim was to 'create ...a spirit of defiance against disability' which would challenge the workshops which had been commonly believed appropriate for the 'down-and-out', 'inferior beings' of the hereditary blind.⁷⁴ Pearson's son was to claim that such efforts resulted in his 'finest achievement' of 'changing blindness in men's minds from an affliction into a handicap'.⁷⁵

The involvement of Sir Arthur Pearson with the NIB was continuing the tradition of blind people taking a major role in the development of this organisation. The history of charities for the blind was not simply one of powerful sighted individuals working in a charitable manner towards a disadvantaged group. The NIB had begun as the British and Foreign Blind Society, founded by Dr. Armitage in 1868 after he had lost his sight, and at a time when it was claimed that most of the blind people in London were 'more or less struggling against their dire affliction', with only one hundred living in 'affluent circumstances'.⁷⁶ Armitage had challenged the idea of the blind being left dependent and in institutions and promoted the adoption of a German system of after-care of pupils leaving schools for the blind which was to evolve into the provision of home-workers in the twentieth century.⁷⁷ Also, he had sought to resolve the 'battle of the types', and promoted the use of Braille after getting the opinions of other blind people on the best method of embossed print.⁷⁸ In 1914, Pearson strengthened the position of the organisation by raising the money to fund the construction of a new building in Great Portland Street which was opened by King George V. At the same time, the title was changed to the National Institute for the Blind. Pearson also oversaw the charity's diversification after the First World War, with an increasing interest in education which included the creation of Chorleywood College for Girls (see Chapter Five), as well as the beginnings of an involvement in Worcester College (assessed in Chapter Three).

Pearson was working alongside Sir Beachcroft Towse on the Executive Council of the NIB. Towse was a war hero with a status amongst the country's elite. A former Gordon Highlanders' Captain, Towse had served in India before losing his sight in a Boer War action which had gained him the Victoria Cross. He had taken as his maxim, 'Blindness can either master a man, or a man can master blindness', and had resolved to continue to

lead a full and active life. He had official state duties as a member of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-At-Arms during the reigns of King Edward VII and George V, providing the NIB with some potentially useful contacts when he became first Vice-Chairman in 1901 and then Chairman after the First World War.⁷⁹

Another addition to the ranks of influential blind men came as a result of the First World War. Ian Fraser, a former student of Marlborough College and Sandhurst, had been blinded in action during the Battle of the Somme. After the war Fraser decided that he wanted a 'wider outlet' and was elected to the London County Council in 1922 and the House of Commons in 1924.⁸⁰ He was later to become a Governor of the British Broadcasting Corporation and a life peer in the House of Lords.⁸¹

Fraser was to become involved on the governors of Worcester College, but came to prominence in voluntary organisations for the blind through his work with St. Dunstan's, the charity which had been set up for blind soldiers in 1915 by Sir Arthur Pearson, with the support of the NIB. The aim was to help these war casualties gain the training and the skills they would need to gain employment. Fraser had been assisted in his recovery and rehabilitation by St. Dunstan's and had become the protégé of Pearson, staying on as his assistant and then as Chairman on the founder's death.

The example presented to members of society of the potential of the 'disabled' by Fraser and the other servicemen at St. Dunstan's did have some impact on negative perceptions of capability. The First World War had reminded the public that disability could not be assumed to be the consequence of working class life. War veterans could not be simply dismissed, and there had been a disproportionately high level of casualties amongst the

young junior officers, drawn predominantly from the public and grammar schools; they had been quick to volunteer for service but their chances of surviving uninjured were low due to the fact that they had to lead their men over the top.⁸² These young men were seen as different to those who had been blinded from childhood and birth and this example, in itself, would not change opinions, but opportunities were available for those willing to capitalise on a growing awareness of the potential of blind people. The Headmaster of Worcester College arranged for his boat crews to row against soldiers and sailors blinded in the war, with a local journalist commenting that he had succeeded in appealing to 'a vastly wider range of public sympathy' and helped to 'gain more of the people's attention ...than the College has previously enjoyed in 49 years'.⁸³

Part of the difference in perception which Brown at Worcester College would seek to exploit was linked to class and this was a factor apparent also in the treatment of disabled former servicemen. Cohen has demonstrated that, although war service was respected and charities such as the War Seal Foundation provided homes for 'war-shattered heroes', many disabled veterans were forced to become dependent on philanthropy; this assistance, while it could be benevolent, could also be controlling and overtly moralistic and restrictive.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Cohen does not effectively differentiate between the experience of the different classes, as well as the implications of different levels of impairment.⁸⁵ As was evident in his own account of his *Victory over Blindness*, Pearson saw no problem in treating blinded officers at St. Dunstan's differently to the ordinary soldiers; he assumed that their education, and thereby intelligence, required separate accommodation (initially in his own home), and different types of occupation.⁸⁶

When he came to consider education, Pearson, as well as the other eminent blind men who will be discussed in Chapter Three, would have been aware that similar separate provision at a secondary school was virtually essential for those destined for the middle classes. Secondary schools of this era were public schools or grammar schools, and many members of the middle classes had an advantage in gaining access as admission was dependent on the payment of fees or the acquisition of a scholarship. This also implied the support of independent schooling, because, as McCulloch has asserted, the private system had 'social superiority', with its 'products' gaining 'political pre-eminence'.⁸⁷ As will be explored in Chapter Four, society was still structured according to a class-based hierarchy, and assumptions were made about the value of certain types of education and the nature of the work resulting. The mid-century Headmaster of Worcester College for the Blind, Brian Bradnack, was to bemoan the way in which those in secondary education did not value practical skills, but recognised this as coming from the nature of a society in which there were 'unequal economic rewards' given to those doing manual work compared to those in non-manual, 'white-collar' occupations.⁸⁸

Towse and Pearson and the leadership of the NIB were amongst those who got involved where they saw gaps in provision for blind people in the early twentieth century. These influential men attempting to develop opportunities, ensured that this group of people with an impairment would have a chance to possess some advantages, but there were still potent influences of class which were going to have an effect on the nature of the education which emerged.

2.3 Summary

A study of the context of the inter-war years does demonstrate that the climate of opinion in society, and also among some of the elite, was such that there were obstacles to advancement for blind people, suggesting that the views of writers, such as Oliver, promoting the Social Model of Disability could have some validity.⁸⁹ However, the situation in the inter-war years was not as clear-cut as a 'strategic power-play' between the various interests affecting blind people. There was a confused interplay of social and economic factors, complicated by a shifting culture of attitudes. There were traditional survivals of prejudices and sympathies, as well as rival approaches towards reducing incidence, making a complex antagonism in which blind people of different classes were able to have some influence. As a result, Government policy was 'eclectic and pragmatic', in the manner identified by Ford, Mongon, and Whelan in their study of factors affecting the education of those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, categorised as 'disturbed'.⁹⁰

The problems experienced by blind children and adolescents in the secondary schools, which are assessed in the subsequent chapters, were partly linked to the class nature of inter-war society, with the thinking on environmental and hereditary causes of blindness drawing many blind people into the lack of status held by the working classes. However, the position of blind people was one in which initiative was possible as the Government was becoming willing to provide some assistance in ways that go beyond simplistic 'social control'. Blind people did have a 'better deal' in Copeland's special education 'card-game', with advantages which 'disabled' individuals had helped to create.⁹¹ These could be exploited by educationalists prepared to work within the prevailing culture of class difference. The secondary schools for the blind would have to work hard to build up

positive perceptions of ability, but, if they operated within the dominant social mores, they could help to pave the way towards the more effective integration of all blind people in society.

2.4 References

¹ Weinberg, 180.

² Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 29: Borsay, *Disability*, 16, 97.

³ Tomlinson, 'Expansion,' 160.

⁴ After a 1914 House of Commons resolution that voluntarism alone would not be sufficient, a Governmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind was appointed.

⁵ Cole, 71.

⁶ Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid*, 5: Borsay, 97, 108-9.

⁸ Copeland, 161.

⁹ Hall, 19.

¹⁰ Payne, 273.

¹¹ Education Act 1921 Articles 61 and 69.

¹² S. Humphries and G. Gordon, *Out of sight: Childhood disability 1900-50* (Plymouth: Northcote, 1992), 12, 25. This is confirmed in A. Wagner-Lampl and G. W. Oliver, 'Folklore of Blindness,' *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 88, no. 3 (1994): 267-76.

¹³ K. Bates, *A Social History of Blindness* (Unpublished PhD: Loughborough, 1998), 36.

¹⁴ K. Jernigan, 'Blindness: Is Literature Against Us?', NFB, (1974, 1999); available from <http://www.blind.net/pba1974.htm> (16/2/2008): Wagner-Lampl and Oliver.

¹⁵ *Ibid*. The themes of confusion and ignorance are evident in the symbolism of blindness in H. G. Wells 'The Country of the Blind', a short story published in the *Strand* magazine,

April 1904 [online story]. *The Literature Network* Available from <http://www.online-literature.com/wellshg/3/> [18/5/2009]

¹⁶ R. Kipling, *The Light that Failed* (1891) [online book]. *Project Gutenberg* available from, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2876>. (20/5/2009)

¹⁷ *Birmingham Gazette*, 23/6/1932.

¹⁸ G. Miller, 'Some problems arising out of the higher education of the blind,' *Teacher of the Blind* XXXVIII (1940): 177.

¹⁹ Darwin did not adopt Herbert Spence's term 'Survival of the Fittest' until the 1872 edition of his work, C. Darwin, *The Origin of the Species* (6th ed. 1872). J. Burrow, 'Editor's Introduction' to C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (London: Penguin, 1968) outlines the impact of Darwin and the extent to which his ideas were used rather than followed by some theorists of Social Darwinism.

²⁰ E. Black, *War Against the Weak: eugenics and America's campaign to create a master race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 18.

²¹ R Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 639.

²² *Ibid*, 640

²³ G. R. Searle, *Eugenics and Politics in Britain* (Leyden: Noordhoff International Publishing, 1976), 93.

²⁴ Letter to the Editor by members of the Eugenics Society, *The Times*, 23/7/1932.

Churchill attended the First International Eugenics Congress in London and became its Vice-Chairman. Shaw stated his belief that 'a great many people would have to be put out of existence simply because it wastes other people's time to look after them.'

(G. B. Shaw, Lecture to the Eugenics Education Society, Reported in *The Daily Express*, 4 March 1910, quoted in Black, 248).

Lawrence had said, "If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber ... and ... I'd ... bring them all in, all the sick, the halt and the maimed; I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks ..." Letter to Blanche Jennings, 1908, quoted in D.J. Childs, *Modernism and Eugenics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 10.

²⁵ Black, 211, 233, 218.

²⁶ A. Barrington and K. Pearson, *A First Study of the Inheritance of Vision and of the Relative Influence of Heredity and Environment on Sight* (London: Dulau, 1909), 60-1.

²⁷ L. Howe, "Concerning a law to lessen hereditary blindness," *American Ophthalmological Society Journal*, 1926 [online article]. American Philosophical Society; available from <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/static/images/308.html> (1/6/2009): L. H. Carris, 'Hereditary Blindness', *Journal of Heredity* 23 (1932): 305-11.

²⁸ Black, 237.

²⁹ Report of the Committee on Sterilisation, 1934, cmd 4485, quoted J. Macnicol, "Eugenics and the Campaign for Voluntary Sterilization in Britain between the wars," *The Society for the Social History of Medicine* 2 (1989): 158.

³⁰ Macnicol, 165.

³¹ See Chapter 6

³² Comment reported by a reader for Sir Rupert Cross. Email Colin Baxter to author, 16/8/2005.

³³ Evidence of J.B. Lawford, *Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Minutes of evidence, appendices and index* (London: HMSO, 1917), 400-3.

³⁴ *British Journal of Nursing*, 24/11/1906, 406.

³⁵ *Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness. Final Report* (London: HMSO, 1922), 11, 34-5, 37.

³⁶ J.M. Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1930), 152.

Ophthalmia neonatorum was 'brought about at birth....The eyelids become red and swollen, and from between them issues a dangerous discharge which causes the lids to stick together and imprisons the malignant fluid'. Ritchie, 152-3.

³⁷ Gordon and Humphries, 67. The Liberal Government introduced free school meals (1906), school medical inspection (1907) and school clinics (1912).

³⁸ Payne, 11.

³⁹ M. Thomas, *Royal National Institute for the Blind 1858-1956* (London: RNIB, 1957), 76-7. She quotes an early Report from the Chorleywood Sunshine home.

⁴⁰ W. R. Davis Minute, 24/1/1918, ED24/1302 NA.

⁴¹ B. Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-40* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), 60.

⁴² A. Pearson, *Victory over Blindness* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 13.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 14.

⁴⁴ RNIB

⁴⁵ T. Cutsforth, *The Blind in School and Society* (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 2nd edition 1951), 2, 46.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, 46.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 189

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 201.

⁴⁹ *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of the Partially Sighted* [Crawley] (London: HMSO, 1934), 49-50.

⁵⁰ Education Act, 1921 s.69.

⁵¹ Humphries and Gordon, 126.

⁵² 'Chairman's Inaugural Address,' *Teacher of the Blind* XXXVIII (1950): 126.

⁵³ K.C., Letter to the editor, *Teacher of the Blind* VII (1919): 32.

⁵⁴ A. Lloyd, 'Is it advisable to train blind people for professional positions?' *Teacher of the Blind* XXIII (1934): 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 30

⁵⁶ Letter, Board of Education to Swindon LEA, 1936 ED 32/832 NA

⁵⁷ G. C. Brown, Address on 'The Secondary Education of the Blind. Midland Branch Report', *Teacher of the Blind* X (Nov 1922): 40.

⁵⁸ Borsay, *Disability*, 7.

⁵⁹ Borsay, *Disability*, 16; Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 29

⁶⁰ Altenbaugh, 716-7, has highlighted the importance of considering the impact of 'disabled' people.

⁶¹ Copeland, 70.

⁶² J. Goodman and J. Martin, 'Networks After Bourdieu: Women, Education and Politics from the 1890s to the 1820s', *History of Education Researcher* no. 80 (2007): 66, 69.

⁶³ Wagner-Lampl and Oliver discuss beliefs that the blind are the possessors of god-given magical powers. The Poor Law of 1601 had allowed monies to be collected 'for the necessary relief of the lame, old, impotent [and] blind'.

⁶⁴ BRIB General Committee Minutes, 17 May 1949, MS 1700/1/1/20, Bham.

⁶⁵ Payne, 3-4; Hurt, 134, 189.

⁶⁶ A. H. Wood memorandum, 27/3/1922, ED50/104 NA.

⁶⁷ 'Obituary Alfred Eichholz, CBE, MD,' *British Medical Journal*, 18/2/1933, 294-5: Cole, 45.

⁶⁸ The College of Teachers of the Deaf and Dumb dates from 1885. The CTB from 1908.

⁶⁹ Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 48: *Departmental Committee Welfare* 232: E.H. Getliff, 'The College of Teachers of the Blind and the Home Teaching Service,' *Teacher of the Blind* XXXVIII (1950): 143-5. CTB discussions included the teaching of domestic science and geometry to the blind. *Teacher of the Blind* XXI (1933): 197 and XXII (1934): 99.

⁷⁰ Altenbaugh, 717.

⁷¹ Thomas, *RNIB*, 36. Measures for the blind were initially to be incorporated in a Poor Law reform.

⁷² R. Heasman, *Who was Sir Cyril Arthur Pearson* (Croydon: Pearson's Holiday Fund, 2001), 22-3.

⁷³ Pearson, 13.

⁷⁴ I. Fraser, *Whereas I was Blind* (Hodder and Stoughton, Edinburgh, 1942), 64.

⁷⁵ Heasman, 22.

⁷⁶ E.C. Johnson, letter to the editor of *The Times*, 29/12/1859.

⁷⁷ Thomas, *RNIB*, 18.

⁷⁸ Some educationalists had been promoting embossed fonts, such as Times New Roman, which could be read by the blind person alongside their family. Braille was favoured because it could be written as well as read.

⁷⁹ 'Personalities in the World of the Blind. IV Capt. E.B.B. Towse', *The Beacon* VIII, no. 91 (July 1924): 5-7

⁸⁰ Fraser, 6-7.

⁸¹ '(William Jocelyn) Ian Fraser,' *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1073.

⁸² 'Casualties were about three times heavier in proportion among junior officers than with common soldiers', A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-45* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1970), 165.

⁸³ *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, August 1915.

⁸⁴ D. Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled veterans in Britain and Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 17, 30-1, 120—3.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 111-2.

⁸⁶ Pearson, 221, 228.

⁸⁷ G. McCulloch, 'From Incorporation to Privatisation: Public and Private Secondary Education in Twentieth-Century England,' in R. Aldrich (ed.), *Public or Private Education? Lessons for History* (London: Woburn, 2004), 55.

⁸⁸ B. O. Bradnack, 'Worcester College for the Blind,' *Teacher of the Blind* XXX (1942): 114.

⁸⁹ Michael Oliver has claimed that, 'The history of the twentieth century for disabled people has been one of exclusion'. Oliver, *Understanding*, 93.

⁹⁰ J. Ford, D. Mongon and M. Whelan, *Special Education and Social Control: Invisible Disasters* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 150.

⁹¹ Copeland, 161. See introduction to chapter.

3. Worcester College for the Blind, 1920-44

I: Developing and maintaining a secondary school for blind boys

In the light of the context of advantages and disadvantages faced by those trying to deliver education for blind boys, described in Chapter Two, the case study of Worcester College seeks to assess the ideas which shaped the education which was presented and delivered. Again the advantage of a detailed assessment of an institution is the ability it presents to evaluate the intricacies of the dominant influences.

However, most of the existing assessments of developments at Worcester College do not assist such a study. The 'house-histories' which have been used as a source by the traditional 'progressive' historians, and even by some of the revisionists, were written for a promotional purpose and have to be viewed with circumspection.¹ For example, Mary Thomas's book on *The First Seventy Years* of Worcester College contained a Preface written by the Chairman of Governors, Viscount Cobham, which promoted the liberal humanitarian view of the development of education and celebrated the position the school had reached by 1936:

This History [of Worcester College]...is not primarily a story of struggles and difficulties; it records the overcoming of one difficulty after another and the achievements of a succession of devoted workers for the blind.... the College takes its recognized place among the public schools of England. This History is primarily the history of that successful development.²

A member of the local aristocracy, Cobham was describing a school in which his family had played a significant role for over forty years.³ Thomas was an employee of the NIB and was commissioned in 1936 by the governors who had some money available to publish a school history. The level to which an 'official' history was created was evident in the Governors' refusal to publish a book written six years earlier by a former student of the 1880s, J. F. Tracy, without the Headmaster carrying out revisions and rewriting.⁴ The other school history by Bell was written at the suggestion of J. C. Colligan, the Director-General of the RNIB, for the school's centenary in 1966 and also presented a tale of individual effort and consequent progress. These developments were seen as confirmed and strengthened by the impact of twentieth century government intervention, which 'secured for gifted blind boys of all classes an educational equality which is still denied their sighted brothers'.⁵

In order to understand the development of Worcester College, the historian has to get beyond these simplistic assessments of the education of the blind whilst not just dismissing activity as predominantly a result of self-interested 'vested' and 'social and economic interests'.⁶ Rather than medical and educational professionals dictating the school's form in the inter-war years, as Tomlinson's paradigm of the social control of the 'disabled' would suggest, the agency of 'disabled' people, highlighted by Altenbaugh in his study of 'polios', was again evident.⁷ Many of the amateur, but influential, blind men discussed in Chapter Two were also seeking to break away from some of the negative perceptions of blindness by providing 'enabling' opportunities at Worcester College.⁸ These men could hardly be accused of wishing the blind to take the position of subjugation which Social Model of Disability writers, such as Cook, Swain and French have assumed.⁹ Again, as in

Chapter Two, the relative advantages possessed by blind people need to be examined, along with the impact that was played by class and gender. The eminent blind men introduced in the last chapter, as well as some former students, had influence, but their role needs to be assessed in terms of their goal of establishing the school's credentials as a public school whose students could claim the same place among the upper ranks of society as that of their sighted peers.

This chapter begins by assessing the nature of the division between private and state provision. By considering the role of voluntary action in relation to the growth of State involvement, the interconnection of the personal with government policy can be examined. The Board of Education was starting to exert some influence in the inter-war years, but the motives for this intervention must be assessed in terms of its willingness to look beyond vocational training and provide effective financial backing for the secondary education of the blind. In an era of post-war economic stringencies and then the Great Depression, the complexities of the funding arrangements can provide an indication of the impact which different groups were attempting to have on the 'disabled'. Given the nature of the financial constraints and the prejudices indicated in Chapter Two, the public school education which emerged would have to be flexible enough to adapt to the expectations of officials as well as middle class parents.

The remainder of the chapter focuses more particularly on the role of individual agency and the voluntary agencies. Writers such as Tomlinson have questioned the motivation and impact of 'individual and charitable enterprise'.¹⁰ However, Bell's centenary history referred to the headship of Brown (1913-38) as the 'Impress of Originality' with a picture created of a headmaster whose vision created a new status for his school and, thereby, his

students.¹¹ Also, in an era when national organisations were working to apply changed Government policies to the blind, the NIB has been portrayed as magnanimously stepping in to provide the funding and security which this pioneering school had always lacked.¹² Instead of such narrow negative and positive interpretations, the evolution of Worcester College in the 1930s has to be considered in terms of a haphazard combination of individual humanitarianism and incompetence, charitable benevolence and self-interest, and Government interest and inaction. The inter-relationships between these contributors are critical to any judgement on the development of special education for the blind, but they cannot be described as anything as straightforward as a 'strategic power-play'.¹³

3.1 The limits of voluntary action and the growth of Government assistance

The disadvantages evident in Chapter Two, alongside the economic environment of the post-war years, presented a major challenge to a special school seeking to expand and consolidate its position amongst secondary schools. At Worcester College, the events of the inter-war years demonstrate the need to differentiate between the legacy of the nineteenth century tradition of individual action and the twentieth century emergence of national charities and growth of Government involvement. The Victorian history of the College had been one in which sighted individuals, working from motives which have been seen as elitist but humanitarian, had played the key role. Both Cole and Tomlinson, from their different historical perspectives, have stressed the importance of voluntary organizations, funded by businessmen, in the development of special education in the nineteenth century, but, as the role of the State developed in the early twentieth century, the influences became more complex and tightly inter-meshed.¹⁴ In her work on disabled veterans after the First World War, Deborah Cohen has stressed the 'dense layer of voluntary organisations that mediated between the individual and the state' in providing

assistance in Britain.¹⁵ This was also true of the special schools of the time. Secondary education may have needed to adapt to gain government approval in order to prosper but, given ‘the unwillingness of the interwar British state to intervene in intractable social problems’, schools also needed to promote themselves in a manner which would gain a level of financial support which individual benevolence was no longer sufficient to provide.¹⁶

Early twentieth century Worcester College retained much of the elitism of its nineteenth century founders. The school had been set up in 1866 by two clergymen, Rev. R. Hugh Blair and Rev. William Taylor, as a response to the requirements of the Victorian class structure.¹⁷ Taylor, a former Superintendent of the Wilberforce Memorial School for the Blind at York, had spoken in 1858 of the particular need to establish a college for the education of the blind of the ‘opulent classes’:

the rich blind may be said to be worse off than the poor, for those who live chiefly by the “labour of their own hands” have opportunities afforded them. . . while the rich, for want of qualified teachers and suitable institutions have great difficulty in procuring such an education as may be in accordance with their station in society.¹⁸

Worcester College had been founded ,‘for the Blind Sons of Gentlemen’, at a time when all provision of education was still voluntary and opportunities for blind children to progress beyond the constraints of an education aimed at manual training were extremely limited. The deed of constitution and Trust for the College for the Higher Education of the Blind

established in 1889 demonstrated the extent to which the school was aimed at giving blind boys from the higher classes access to a public school education:

The purpose and object of the College shall be to bestow a religious and liberal education upon male persons afflicted with total and partial blindness, and belonging, by birth and breeding, to the upper, the professional or the middle classes of society.¹⁹

If Taylor, and the first two headmasters, Blair and Rev. Samuel Forster, had been the initial key to survival, its long-term development had not been assured; voluntarism was not going to be sufficient. The school lacked the endowments of most of the public and grammar schools of the time. The benevolence of a local woman, Eliza Warrington, was critical in purchasing the site and beginning the building work essential to providing the school with a permanent home.²⁰ However, when George Clifford Brown was appointed as Headmaster in 1913, numbers had fallen and there were only three pupils.²¹ The role and standing of the school still had to be properly established in the educational world of the early twentieth century.

The way the school was to develop during the First World War, and in the years immediately after, demonstrates an example of the 'attempts' McCulloch has identified 'to cross the line between state and private provision,' as well as the ambiguities of the national situation towards the secondary education of the blind.²² The school had to endeavour to exploit its unique position and sources of charitable income in its efforts to ensure survival. In 1914, the school did have £345 in endowment income, but it was mainly dependent on fees. As a result, Brown and the governors appear to have decided

that the only way to ensure the status of the secondary education for blind boys was to turn the school from being effectively a small private school into one recognised as a public school (the implications of this are discussed in Chapter Four). This was despite the fact that the College could never be a public school with quite the same narrow class base as the Headmasters' Conference [HMC] schools at the turn of the twentieth century.²³ One of the primary difficulties was the limited number of blind potential students of academic ability from the wealthier classes who were capable of paying the fees. In 1914, there were fifteen pupils, but the parents of only three of these were able to afford the full cost, which varied from £60 to £80 according to age. Nearly half of the cost of fees was provided by school and Gardner's Trust scholarship funds as well as some money coming from the new LEAS.²⁴

LEA funding was a consequence of changes in Government policy towards secondary education. Under the Education Act of 1902, the State committed itself to ensuring a form of secondary education which was to be based on the grammar school tradition.²⁵ The Board of Education provided guidance and some monitoring through the inspection of these schools. Fees were retained, but a supply of scholarships from local authorities was envisaged so that 'ample provision' would enable 'selected children of poorer parents to climb the educational ladder'.²⁶ However, by 1915, only four LEAs had stepped in to assist students, and then only to provide about £20 a year towards fees.²⁷ When the future Chair of Governors, Arthur Pearson interviewed G. C. Brown for the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind in 1915, he asked, 'Would you say, so far as blind boys are concerned, there is no complete ladder of education, about which we hear so much, from the bottom rung to the top?' Brown's response was direct and reflected the inequality: 'Hardly; there is for some, but certainly not for all.'²⁸

By the time that Brown was interviewed, the school authorities had come to realise that they needed Government recognition and support and they had begun to look to the acquisition of grant status as a possible solution to their financial difficulties.²⁹ The school had to adapt to national standards in an attempt to gain state recognition and assistance with funding. Restrictions on entry linked to class had nominally gone by 1915, when the Inspectors commented that the only conditions for admission 'appear to be a reasonable faculty of self-help and ability to profit by a course of secondary education'.³⁰ One student's father was a shop-keeper and another was the son of a farm labourer who had arrived at sixteen having received no secondary education.³¹ However, as Bell has described, 'it was hardly a social revolution, but evolutionary it certainly was': blind boys from poorer backgrounds still needed to access sufficient education to prove their potential and required parents who could manage the existing structures well enough to apply for an assisted place.³²

In 1915, Government inspectors did recognise the pioneering and 'important and necessary work' of this secondary school.³³ As a result Worcester College was recognised as 'efficient', but this was not to ensure financial support, as the inspectors merely ended their report with an appeal to 'potential benefactors'.³⁴ Part of the problem was the nature of the school established by the early benefactors. The Trust Deed still made stipulations about the headmaster's religion. With £550 per annum at stake, in 1918 the Board of Governors made the alterations necessary to bring the school in line with national requirements; a conscience clause allowed a student to be withdrawn from religious worship and instruction.³⁵

Nevertheless, struggling to meet the demands of war, Government support for all secondary education was limited. The 1918 Act attempted to ensure the possibility of secondary education for those perceived as most able, regardless of ability to pay fees, with Section Two placing a 'duty' on local authorities to develop advanced courses 'for the older or more intelligent children' in elementary schools by providing central schools or other arrangements.³⁶ A committee chaired by Young in 1920 calculated that 21,000 children were being excluded from secondary schools because of lack of space; this figure included potential fee-payers as well as 11,134 who had qualified for free places.³⁷ Brian Simon has gone as far as to suggest that:

the history of the early post-war years is in large part one of attempts to make full use of ... the Act in the face of attempts to nullify their operation.³⁸

Board of Education plans were particularly severely affected by the Geddes Committee's proposals to curtail Government expenditure at a time of inflation. The 'Geddes Axe' was not the only problem a secondary school faced in its attempts to strengthen its financial position after the First World War. The rate of Income Tax had gone up from five shillings to six shillings where it stayed for three years, putting pressure on parents paying fees. Any chance of gaining increased funding from parents or Government would be limited, restricting scope for the development of the school curriculum. In the early 1920s, Worcester College's teaching staff consisted of only the Headmaster and four Assistant Masters, a situation considered by Inspectors as 'just sufficient and in no way extravagant'.³⁹

Humphries and Gordon have suggested that physically disabled children were a low priority for government so there was little monitoring of the voluntary societies by government inspectors.⁴⁰ In fact, Government was not uninterested in what was happening; the problem could have been a lack of expertise. The 1924 Inspection team admitted to being on 'unfamiliar ground' and could only 'express their admiration at the ingenuity and success with which boys are helped to rise above and beyond their infirmity'.⁴¹ The 1931 Inspection appeared more rigorous and will be seen later in the chapter to have had a great impact on the future of the College.

The boundaries between independent provision and public involvement in special secondary education were beginning to break down, but the problem was the unwillingness of the central government in the 1920s to commit the money needed to provide full support for secondary education. Even if the staff was kept small, the level of State assistance was still not enough to secure the school's future. The efforts of individuals had established the school, but more solid help from larger charities was necessary if it was to ensure survival against the increasing demands of Government inspectors and rising expectations of secondary education.

3.2 The influence of Blind Men

More substantial assistance was to come from the involvement of leading members of the NIB in Worcester College. Views of education being imposed on the 'handicapped' have assumed that the individuals themselves can take no role and are relegated to insignificance. Humphries and Gordon have bemoaned the lack of a voice for disabled people in the education of the inter-war years.⁴² However, the situation at this one school

demonstrates the involved nature of the power relations which governed developments for blind children.

Illustration 3-A, taken to commemorate the opening of a boathouse for the College Boat club in October 1923, would apparently fit in with a negative perception of a self-serving humanitarian beneficence. Prominent in the centre of the picture were the aristocrat Chairman of Governors, Viscount Cobham, and Guy Nickalls, an Old Etonian and Oxford Rowing Blue who was a respected sporting figure after his achievements in the Henley regatta and the Olympics. Shortly after this visit as a guest, Nickalls agreed to join the Governors.⁴³ Behind Cobham stood Brown, the Headmaster, who, as will be shown in Chapter Four, had deliberately promoted the introduction of rowing in the College.



Illustration 3-A: The Opening of the Worcester College Boat Club, 6th October

1923.⁴⁴

However, this view of powerful sighted individuals was only part of the picture. If it had not been for an unfortunate accident two years earlier, Sir Arthur Pearson undoubtedly would have been the Chairman sitting in the centre of the photograph.⁴⁵ The blind NIB president was only in the Chair at Worcester for a short time, but his 'driving force and grasp of detail' led to the erection of the boathouse, as well as the expansion of the school site and buildings with the purchase of a new house for the Headmaster.⁴⁶ Pearson's death did not end the influence of the blind as much of the determining power within the school Governors remained with other men of status, two of whom were seated on Cobham's right at the opening.

In the photograph, Sir Beachcroft Towse was sitting immediately beside Cobham. As was shown in Chapter Two, Towse's status as a holder of the Victoria Cross would have made him a man whose opinions could not be ignored. Ian Fraser was another blind war hero who was on the Governors from 1919, although he does not appear to have been present at the opening. Towse, Pearson and Fraser were all former public school boys and they were prepared to use their influence on the Governors to forward the interests of the blind in the school very directly.⁴⁷ They did not perceive the education as a controlling measure. They obviously had a perception of the capability of blind adults and the role of the school in generally promoting the interests of blind men. This was made very clear to the headmaster in 1923. The Governors blocked a plan, made on the grounds of economy, to dismiss a member of staff who had been blinded during the Third Battle of Ypres, stating that as a general principle:

The Headmaster should be asked in future not to dismiss a blind assistant master without previous reference to a meeting of the Governors.⁴⁸

These men were not mere exceptions to the general view of the lack of influence of the blind, as on Towse's right in the photograph was Sir Washington Ranger, who had been one of the first Worcester College students and a man whose friendship was largely responsible for encouraging Pearson's involvement in blind causes. Ranger had gone on to qualify as a solicitor, having become the first blind man to be awarded the Doctor of Civil Law from the University of Oxford, and had established a highly successful London firm, Ranger, Burton and Frost. As well as representing the Salvation Army, Ranger's firm acted as the Worcester College solicitors; this could only confirm his importance on a Board of Governors for which he was Honorary Secretary for forty years and where he remained until ill-health caused his resignation in 1924.⁴⁹ Even then Sir Washington's influence was not removed, as his son, a fully-sighted former captain in the services, Vincent Ranger, had joined the Board.

Sir Washington was replaced as Honorary Secretary in 1920 by Godfrey Mowatt, the son of a senior Civil Servant, another former Worcester student who had been blinded as the consequence of an accident with a knife at the age of seven.⁵⁰ Mowatt had devoted his adult life to public affairs. He had become a magistrate and played a leading role on the Local Board of Poor Law Guardians and a number of wartime organizational committees. He was highly involved in blind education and welfare, sitting on the Governors of the Royal Normal College, the Barclay Institution and the National Library for the Blind,

before gaining governmental recognition by being invited to serve on the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.⁵¹

None of the blind men who were governors would fit into the traditional stereotype of the blind, described in Chapter Two, as a passive and accepting group whose lot in life was dictated to them. Men with a secondary education who were blind could not only lead charities, but they could also enhance the status of blind people in society. The important thing was that these men had the status of gentleman given by the birth and education which was important in the society of the early 1920s. Their background influenced their vision for the school with the Governors under Pearson stating that ‘the College was not a local but an Imperial Institution and should be governed on the same basis as other great public schools.’⁵² Mowatt, who had filled in briefly as a History teacher in the early days of Brown’s headmastership, was said to have been convinced that the ‘College should be developed into a great public school where blind boys could enjoy all that public school life offers to others’.⁵³

The assertiveness of blind people did help to ensure a somewhat higher status than many other ‘disabled’ groups. Initially, it was the fact that blindness can be the consequence of accident and late onset, affecting able and successful individuals who were in a position of influence, which was to assist in making it difficult for society to dismiss their voice.

3.3 *The changing role of a national charity*

The links of men such as Pearson, Ranger and Towse to the NIB were to be of considerable significance for the development of Worcester College despite the fact that, for virtually the whole of Brown's headship, the college was independent of outside control. The

college was very much a part of Worcester and had members of the Cathedral and city on its governors. Nevertheless, in order to survive as an independent secondary school for the blind at that time, additional funds needed to be sought. By this time, the key benefactors in voluntary social provision had changed from being individuals, to the charitable society, which David Owen in his study of *English Philanthropy* has described as the 'distinctive modern technique'.⁵⁴ As the emphasis had altered from assisting the individual to tackling underlying problems, the expertise provided by an organization became essential, but, the increasing professionalism required by such charities working alongside growing Government involvement, created vested interests with their own complex motivations.⁵⁵ For Worcester College, involvement with outside bodies, which had their own priorities and philosophies, while bringing undoubted advantages, produced its own problems as their own particular concerns intervened.

Some charitable organisations did have a long-standing interest in Worcester College. The Gardner's Trust and the Clothworkers' Company preserved a link begun in the nineteenth century by continuing their provision of scholarships. The Trust was the result of a bequest made by Henry Gardner, a wealthy Londoner, and it retained the right to nominate a governor, as well as contributing occasionally to additional projects (such as the publication of a school history in the 1930s). The Clothworkers' Company, one of the liveried companies of London, had lost its textile links and was concentrating on using many of its resources for charitable purposes. It was allowed a representative on the Governors, with their Clerk, P. M. Evans, elected to a seat in 1921.⁵⁶ Again personal links were probably significant here, with Towse a member, and later a Master, of the Company.⁵⁷

The most significant charitable link was to be the NIB and the position of the school in the 1920s and 1930s was greatly affected by its fluctuating relationship with this growing organisation. Ranger had met Dr. Armitage and maintained a long association with the NIB, and, like Towse, eventually became Chairman. Growing difficulties with debt and deficits had pushed Lord Cobham, the Chairman of Governors, and Washington Ranger into meeting with Sir Arthur Pearson, the NIB President in 1917. They had been assured that the charity would 'interest itself in the future of the College and would assist it financially'.⁵⁸ The immediate result was a contribution of £1,000 which, under Clause 20 of the Deed of Constitution, gave the NIB the right to nominate Mowatt, a Council member, as a governor.⁵⁹ In May 1918, Pearson became a trustee of the College, and, over the next three years, the NIB bought the boat-house as well as an adjacent house which was to become the headmaster's residence. By 1920, the increasingly close links with the NIB were reflected in the regularity with which the school Governors met at the charity's headquarters in Great Portland Street in London. The relationship was confirmed in 1922 when the NIB became the sole Trustee, but this was in a custodian role, where they had to 'act under the direction of, and be subordinate to the Governing Body, who shall be the sole ultimate authority in the conduct of the College'.⁶⁰

Despite this link, the relationship was far from smooth as the NIB struggled to manage its growing interests and demands at a time of adversity for the British economy and philanthropies. The charity, like many others, experienced problems in the aftermath of the Great War. Rising prices and high taxes, increasing operating costs and the long-term impact of the success of the successful wartime fund-raising drives, affected income.⁶¹ In the year after Pearson's death, the school was told that they 'should not look to the Institute for financial support' for any new liabilities, with the only exception being the overdraft

that had been guaranteed by the NIB with the College bankers.⁶² By 1923, under the Secretary-Generalship of Henry Stainsby, the charity had a debt of £40,000. With Mowatt as Honorary Treasurer, this deficit was reportedly cleared within a year, but some Governors may have felt forced to choose between their commitment to the school and their involvement in the NIB.⁶³ There was tension with a failed appeal for reimbursement for expenditure incurred 'at the suggestion of the later Sir Arthur Pearson' and, in 1922, concern over possible conflicts of interest led Ranger to recommend sending a written appeal, instead of a deputation.⁶⁴ In 1924, at the height of the NIB's financial difficulties, and after having to remind the NIB of their responsibility for the agreed deficit, Ranger and Towse resigned from the Governors (reportedly on health grounds, with Towse later returning).⁶⁵

The NIB did discharge the overdraft in 1924, but the relationship initially appears to have become more difficult after Waldo McGillicuddy Eagar became Secretary General in 1928.⁶⁶ After what was seen as a lack of close financial management by Stainsby, the trustees of the NIB, many of whom were sighted, appear to have decided to favour the appointment of a more experienced manager. Fraser was to say at Eagar's retirement that he had 'brought into the blind world a professional knowledge and experience', but, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Seven, it was this growth of professionalism which was to bring in the conflicts created by 'vested interests'.⁶⁷ Eagar was fully sighted and had a background of involvement with voluntary organizations, including the National Association of Boys' Clubs and the Federation of Residential Settlements. He had been invited by Lloyd George to organize his Land Enquiry and was later charged with leading the Liberal Industrial Enquiry. An article about the Secretary General in the *Beacon* of 1928 described how he had 'always made it his aim to organize and administer non-

commercial undertakings with as scrupulous attention to economy and output as would be given in a business house'.⁶⁸

Having inherited an organization which was in 'troubled water', Eagar was determined to improve the financial situation.⁶⁹ His efforts were rapidly to create a conflict with the College over fund-raising. He decided to encourage attempts to 'unify collections for the Blind', to avoid a position where the school and the charity could come into opposition.⁷⁰ The school response to the NIB, despite the fact that Mowatt and Towse were members of the Institute's Finance Committee, was to state that:

Governors of Worcester College are determined to carry on the College on the lines of a big Public School. In their opinion that object could hardly be dependent on its financial side on an institution collecting funds of a charitable nature.⁷¹

Co-operation was still desired but independence was maintained as the two's interests seemed to diverge. The emphasis on dependency in NIB fund-raising, as shown in Chapter Two, did not fit in with the image the College was promoting. The College continued with its own appeals, gaining additional funding for students from individuals as well as the first Nuffield grant in the early 1930s.⁷²

However, circumstances did not allow Worcester to preserve this self-sufficiency. The situation did change again with the school putting itself completely under the NIB's control in 1936, and this was the result of a coalescence of national, international, local and personal factors. The World Depression of the early 1930s made the situation more

difficult. Some parents struggled to pay, and there was a slight fall in numbers with the College having to write off nearly £270 in irrecoverable fees in 1934-5.⁷³ The Board of Education was looking for cuts as part of the National Government's policy of retrenchment. They reduced the grant by ten per cent which placed pressure on the school to follow national policy and reduce teachers' salaries by ten per cent. The impact of the slump was worsened by the extra expenditure on staff needed to meet the Board of Education recommendations after an inspection report of 1931 was critical of unqualified staff, and the decision was taken to appoint two appropriately qualified replacements.⁷⁴ Part of the problem reported in the inspection was Brown's lack of control of the staff which also worsened the financial situation, as did his extravagance.⁷⁵

Brown's strengths had been in teaching rather than administering, and his control of finances worsened after his wife's death in 1930. Brown's daughter took over as housekeeper and costs came to be seen as 'high' by both the Inspectors in 1931 and Governors in 1936.⁷⁶ One of the problems was the manner in which the headmaster lived. Brown's salary was supplemented by his living expenses in the Gables, the Headmaster's house, being covered. The terms of his contract did not help a man with expensive tastes in fine wines and game who had a love of entertaining. Large debts of £2000 were reputed to have been accumulated with the local wine merchant and butcher.⁷⁷

As a consequence of both the national and school-based issues, the annual deficit rose from £727 in 1933-4 to £1395 in 1934-35, with an accumulated deficit of £4000 by 1936.⁷⁸ The position of the finances was unsustainable. Closer cooperation with the NIB had resumed in 1934 when Eagar became a Liaison officer, conferring with Brown on the financial assistance of pupils. Cobham led a Committee, which also contained Mowatt, to examine

the finances and proposed approaching the NIB. The result of this was a new Deed of Trust signed in the summer of 1936 by Cobham for the College, and Towse and Eagar for the NIB.⁷⁹ Complete educational control remained with the Governors, but the officers of the Institute were to have executive financial control. The reconstituted school retained its links with the city and Cathedral of Worcester, as well as a representative of the old universities, Gardner's Trust and the NIB, but was also to contain include a nominee of the new universities.⁸⁰ The impossibility of a school which stayed outside mainstream practices surviving with an appropriately qualified staff was recognized with the adoption of the national Burnham Scale pay rates for teachers.⁸¹

The official historians have presented these events as an inevitable development. Thomas was approached as an NIB employee to write her book in early 1937 and it was read by the Vice-Chairman and Headmaster before it was approved for publication.⁸² Unsurprisingly, therefore, Thomas stressed the difficulties of independence:

For many years past, the balance-sheets of the College had made it clear that expenditure was steadily outrunning income, and although generous legacies and gifts from individuals as well as grants from charitable societies had been received, they did not provide the College with the assured income that was essential for the carrying on of the higher education of blind boys. Only such an income, combined with stringent financial administration, would make the continuance of the work possible.⁸³

Although Bell recognises that 'unrecovered fees' played a role, he stresses the problems resulting from the lack of a financial basis for the school; the NIB's involvement meant that, 'The College had at last emerged from the shadows of financial jeopardy'.⁸⁴

Loyalty, and the need to preserve a public image, may have meant that the role that Brown played was disguised in the histories and speeches when the headmaster retired in 1938, but it was obvious in the actions of the NIB and governors behind the scenes at the time. The Honorary Secretary wrote to the Headmaster stating the opinion of the Governors that 'the serious financial position was largely due to his own mismanagement and lack of supervision' and they put 1930 as the beginning of the problems.⁸⁵ Brown's daughter was removed from her housekeeping role, and his son was to lose his retainer for his contributions to social activities. Expenses for the Headmaster's house were kept separate and the Governors made it clear that Brown would not be allowed to continue beyond the age of sixty.⁸⁶

The school had perhaps expanded too quickly at a time of world economic crisis after the first total war and the crisis for capitalism. Poor financial management had certainly not assisted, but the problems of existence, in an age when the right of full support for secondary education for students with a low incidence handicap had not been asserted, was going to cause problems in gaining sufficient numbers to ensure that the curriculum was staffed in a manner appropriate in a school providing all the subjects of a secondary curriculum. This created the strains which were to lead to the crisis the school faced during these years. The involvement of the NIB as the supporting body was perhaps inevitable given the growing assertiveness of senior figures who were blind in that movement.

3.4 Summary

The history of Worcester College in the inter-war years demonstrates that perpetuating myths, whether from a traditional 'progressive' or revisionist 'social control' perspective, does not help to gain an understanding of the development of a secondary school for blind boys.⁸⁷ The humanitarianism presented by Cole may have played some part, but negative views of disability and class presented a challenge and the increased assertiveness of adult blind men was essential factor to enabling growth and survival. The 'strategic power-play' was, in practice, more about economic realities and the role of individual agency, with blind men assisting in the arrangement of pragmatic responses.

Reviewing Worcester College from a post-revisionist historical perspective, rather than according to the social theories which have influenced the view of special education in Tomlinson or Borsay, does reveal the complexity of the causes of developments.⁸⁸ What is evident in a study of the dominant influences on the school is the manner in which individual, and local, philanthropy was superseded by organised charities, with the Government becoming involved in the independent provision of secondary special education even when it was limited by financial constraints. The role of a leader as long-serving as Brown cannot be summarised simply as a 'golden age', as was the case in the official school history.⁸⁹ The financial position of the school was precarious in an era in which the State was unwilling to guarantee the funding of places, but the headmaster's mismanagement during the time of the Great Depression was critical in bringing the school under the full control of a national charity.

Nevertheless, whatever the different agendas of the individuals responding to the diverse pressures and stresses of the period, the NIB and Governors were still in agreement in 1936

that it was necessary to 'ensure the status of Worcester College as a public school for blind boys'.⁹⁰ This was the legacy of the Governors of the early 1920s and Brown. Even when they were questioning Brown's future, the Governors still recognized his 'great and devoted service' and his role in developing the College:

The success of it has been entirely due to his own personality and it is no exaggeration to say that his whole life has been devoted to the care and welfare of the boys under his charge.⁹¹

The school he had created could provide opportunities enabling blind boys to advance and gain middle class rank, and what this was to represent will be the subject of the next chapter.

3.5 References

- ¹ They display the 'lack of independence' and tendency to develop uncritical accounts' criticised by McCulloch, 'Insider', 51.
- ² Viscount Cobham, 'Preface', in M. Thomas, *The First Seventy Years Worcester College for the Blind 1866-1936* (NIB, London, 1938), vi.
- ³ The 8th Viscount was Chairman of Governors from 1891 to 1919, and the 9th from 1923.
- ⁴ WCB Gov Mins 9/2/1931, NCW. Tracy refused to accept these alterations and his manuscript does not appear to have survived.
- ⁵ D. Bell (ed.), *An Experiment in Education: the History of Worcester College for the Blind 1866 – 1966* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 77.
- ⁶ Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 29.
- ⁷ Altenbaugh, 716-7.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, 27.
- ⁹ Cook et al, 308. See Chapter 1.1.
- ¹⁰ Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 28-9; Tomlinson, 'Profile', 130.
- ¹¹ Brown was appointed on 14th December 1912 and took charge in January 1913.
- ¹² Thomas, *First Seventy*, 107-8.
- ¹³ See 1.1.
- ¹⁴ Cole, 7; Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 36-7.
- ¹⁵ Cohen, 189.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, 5.
- ¹⁷ Blair taught at King's School Worcester.

¹⁸ W. Taylor, 'On the Education of the Blind, especially those in the Opulent classes and on the establishment of a college for them', Sept. 1858, 4, Box SA NCW. The Wilberforce School provided the 'indigent blind' with manual training and employment in workshops.

¹⁹ Deed of Constitution and Trust 11th July 1889, ED32/1274 NA.

²⁰ The school started at the Commandery in Worcester, moving to Slaughter's Court in Powick before the current site was acquired.

²¹ During Forster's headship, there were about twenty blind pupils, with twelve sighted pupils. Sighted boys boosted numbers and provided readers.

²² McCulloch, 'From Incorporation', 53.

²³ Although there were variations, students were predominantly from the upper class and upper middle classes, J. Roach, *Secondary Education in England 1870-1902* (London: Routledge, 1991), 137-41.

²⁴ £592 of help was given with fees, at a time when the school's total income had been £1,650. Evidence given May 1915, G.C. Brown to the *Departmental Committee Welfare*, 165.

²⁵ Roach, 252.

²⁶ *Report of the Royal Commission on Secondary Education* [The Bryce Report] (London: HMSO, 1895), 300.

²⁷ *Departmental Committee Welfare*, 172, 165.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁹ Thomas, 71.

³⁰ Report of the Inspection of the College for the Higher Education of the Blind, 13th and 14th July 1915. ED32/1274 NA.

- ³¹ *Departmental Committee Welfare*, 172: the labourer's son became a Unitarian minister, Bell, 52.
- ³² Bell, 53: A Gardner's Trust application required an accompanying doctor's certificate and reference. *Departmental Committee Welfare*, 165.
- ³³ Inspection Report 1915.
- ³⁴ Letter Board of Education to WCB, 3/9/1915 ED32/1274 NA: Report of inspection, 1915.
- ³⁵ WCB Gov Mins, 19/11/1918.
- ³⁶ Simon, *Politics*, 20-1
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.
- ³⁹ HMI Report to Governors, WCB Gov Mins, 13/2/1924.
- ⁴⁰ Humphries and Gordon, 67.
- ⁴¹ HMI Report 13/2/1924.
- ⁴² Humphries and Gordon, 9.
- ⁴³ WCB Gov mins 31/3/1924.
- ⁴⁴ B4 NCW
- ⁴⁵ See Chapter 2.2. Pearson died in 1921 after slipping in the bath and drowning while unconscious.
- ⁴⁶ Thomas, *First Seventy*, 86.
- ⁴⁷ Towse had attended Wellington College and Pearson, Winchester.
- ⁴⁸ WCB Gov Mins 5/3/1923.
- ⁴⁹ 'Personalities in the World of the Blind III Sir Washington Ranger,' *The Beacon* VIII, no. 90 (June 1924), 5-7.

⁵⁰ WCB Gov Mins 13/7/1920.

⁵¹ 'Personalities in the World of the Blind. Godfrey F. Mowatt,' *The Beacon* IX, no. 98 (Feb. 1925), 5-6.

⁵² WCB Gov mins, 10/7/1919.

⁵³ Lonsdale, 16.

⁵⁴ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy* (London: OUP, 1965), 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

⁵⁶ WCB Gov mins 21/7/1921.

⁵⁷ List of Masters, Clothworkers' Company, http://www.clothworkers.co.uk/pages/homepage/the_company/governance/list_of_masters/default.aspx (24/5/2009).

⁵⁸ WCB Gov. mins. 6/11/1917.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

⁶⁰ Thomas, *First Seventy*, 87. WCB Gov. Mins.

⁶¹ Owen, 527.

⁶² WCB Gov Mins 14/11/1922

⁶³ K. Lonsdale, *Forth in Thy Name: the life and work of Godfrey Mowatt* (Winchester: Warren and Son, 1959), 27.

⁶⁴ WCB Gov Mins 19/7/1923.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*., 31/3/1924.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*., 24/7/1924

⁶⁷ 'Retirement of Mr. W. McG. Eagar, CBE, MA,' *The New Beacon* XXXIV, 397 (1950): 8.

⁶⁸ 'A Brilliant career,' *The Beacon* XII (June 1928): 5.

⁶⁹ 'Retirement of Eagar,' *New Beacon*, 11.

⁷⁰ Letter from the NIB, 11/9/1929, WCB Gov Mins 17/9/1929.

⁷¹ WCB Gov Mins 17/9/1929.

⁷² The car-maker William Morris, Lord Nuffield, was to become a major philanthropist, setting up the Nuffield Foundation in 1943.

⁷³ WCB Gov Mins 28/2/1936.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 19/2/1932.

⁷⁵ Board of Education Interview memorandum Lord Cobham and G.F. Mowatt after the Report of Inspection 10th and 11th November 1931. ED32/382 NA

⁷⁶ Between 1934 and 1935 costs went up by over 14% whereas prices increased by 4%. WCB Gov Mins 28/2/1936.

⁷⁷ John P. Correll, 'The Gables and its tenants', 899:1207 BA 12891 (v) WA.

⁷⁸ WCB Gov Mins, 28/2/1936.

⁷⁹ WCB Deed of Trust, 14/8/1936. ED32/1274 NA.

⁸⁰ WCB Gov Mins, 26/5/1936.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 19/2/1937.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 12/10/1937.

⁸³ Thomas, *First Seventy*, 106-7.

⁸⁴ Bell, 62.

⁸⁵ WCB Gov Mins 26/5/1936.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14/5/1937. Brown retired at 59 due to ill-health. He died in 1944.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 1.1.

⁸⁸ See Chapter 1.1 and 1.2.

⁸⁹ Bell, 40.

⁹⁰ Letter from Eagar to Mowatt, 27/3/1936, quoted WCB Committee of Investigation Minutes, 7/4/1936.

⁹¹ WCB Gov Mins, 26/5/1936.

4. Worcester College for the Blind before 1944. II: An 'enabling' secondary school for blind boys?

Individuals and charities have been shown to have played a joint role in the development of Worcester College for the Blind, but if these diverse interests were to provide an 'enabling' education which would challenge the 'disabling' attitudes and policies of the inter-war era, they would have to break the mould for the education of the blind.

Chapter One of this thesis began with a translation of the Latin words of the Worcester College hymn. The use of an ancient language, along with the reference to going on to 'high positions' in the elite, was an indicator of the image that this secondary school was attempting to promote when it was written in the late nineteenth century. Under G. C. Brown, Headmaster from 1913 to 1938, the school was to position itself carefully as a public school for blind boys. When Bell in his centenary history described the period under Brown as the school's 'golden age', he was considering the innovations made, as well as the prestige gained, and this has been a view that that has influenced other writers, including Payne and Rose, to see the school as preparing its students effectively so that they could succeed in life.¹ However, given the weaknesses in the school histories, discussed at the beginning of the last chapter, this simple notion of change representing progress does need to be questioned. The Headmaster and governors could be seen to be marketing the school and organising the curriculum in a way that appeared to pay little attention to the individual needs of the blind. This could support French's criticism that even if the school was allowing students to pass examinations, they were still leaving them socially isolated and unable to be effective citizens.²

None of the writing on Worcester College has evaluated the school in terms of the political, medical and social context laid out in Chapter Two. Class and notions of male gender were important and the manner in which other secondary schools prepared boys for adult life must be considered. Heward has shown the significance for Ellesmere College of adopting 'the most prestigious models of masculinity' as part of preparing its students for membership of the male elite.³ Therefore, a school for blind boys which wanted to promote its students would not only have to deal with constraints linked to class and disability, but would also have to consider notions of gender. This would have presented particular problems, because, as Robertson has shown, twentieth century hegemonic masculinity has been expressed through the material body and defined through 'notions of strength, rationality, self-reliance, potency and action'.⁴ At Worcester College, a comparative notion of masculine behaviour for blind boys would be required to enable the conquest of societal barriers.

The first two sections of this chapter look at the implications of the Edwardian public school education adopted for a school for the blind as well as how the presentation of the College had to evolve as this model of schooling was adapting as a result of the trauma of the 'Great War'. This allows an assessment, not only of the individual agency of the two Headmasters, but also of the significance for Worcester College and its students of a path which met the needs of parents from the 'anxious' middle classes by diverging well away from the accepted form of special education in the early twentieth century.⁵ The extent to which Worcester could thereby be considered as truly 'enabling' for blind boys is then evaluated through the rest of the chapter in terms of the class base of the pupils, the curriculum they followed and their roles in adult life.

Such questions are significant in relation to the literature reflecting on the school as even critics of special schooling, such as Cook et al, have recognised that past students have a mainly positive view of Worcester College while not challenging the simplistic assessment that the school brought great advantages but only to a favoured few.⁶ Nevertheless, Worcester College was not serving a narrow elite so the boys' achievements would have implications for special education, as would some of the weaknesses which former students have identified. As was explained in Chapter One, one of the aims of this thesis has been to triangulate a range of written sources with interviews. When talking outside the confrontational constraints of the modern mainstream versus special school debate, former students will be shown to have weighed up the advantages and disadvantages, and, if they do finally come down in favour of the advantages their education has given, they can tend to be critical of some of the limitations of what they were taught.⁷

4.1 The implications of following the Edwardian Public School Model for a Special School for the Blind

Worcester College was always meant to acquire status by standing out as an exception to the general model of education for the blind as it existed in the locally supported institutions.⁸ In order to differentiate the school from the other elementary schools, and establish the position of its students, a secondary curriculum was offered. By providing such an education Worcester College was giving its students with opportunities for advancement beyond those available to most other children. By the end of the nineteenth century, most professions required a university degree or prolonged training, and this meant that secondary schooling was an essential preliminary; for the eighty per cent of all children in England and Wales who left school at the minimum school leaving age of

fourteen, most of them having attended only all-age schools, such a chance of admission to the elite would be virtually impossible.

Although, as has been demonstrated in the last chapter, Worcester College did gain some LEA funding and Government grants for students, which brought it more in line with the new grammar schools, in 1913, Brown, the new headmaster, and the governors were in agreement that they should seek public school status. McCulloch has shown how social differences persisted between day grammar schools and boarding public schools, and Brown would have been aware that the latter model of education would provide the greatest possibilities for entry into the higher ranks of society in the early twentieth century.⁹

In order to deliver an academic education, and perhaps to demonstrate the school's distinctive nature, the Governors chose new headmasters from outside special schooling. In 1913, the governors decided not to appoint the most prominent educationalist of the blind, J.M Ritchie, who was then at Henshaw's in Manchester.¹⁰ The reason given was that he was not a graduate, which was against the terms of the Deed of Trust; although, with the requirement for a clergyman being rescinded, this document was capable of amendment. However, governors, who wished to establish a headmaster who could be considered to be on a par with other public and grammar schools, would have been aware that experience of working in Elementary Education for the Blind would not suffice in an era in which 'masters' were seen as being of a higher class to 'teachers'.¹¹ Brown, the successful candidate, had attended Solent College before gaining his MA and a Diploma in the Theory and Practice of Education from London University. He had become the Headmaster of Tollington School, a private secondary school in London, at the age of

twenty-six. When Brown retired in 1938, the increased prominence of the school enabled the Governors to choose a Headmaster with even more elite credentials. Brian Bradnack was an Oxford graduate who was working at a school with membership of the Headmasters' Conference (HMC), Dean Close School in Cheltenham.

Brown and Bradnack could be appointed because, by adopting a public school model, the school would be paying little attention to the additional needs of the blind. In the early years of the twentieth century, a public school education meant that the purpose and object of the school would be to 'bestow a religious and liberal education upon male persons'.¹² By this, Brown and the governors thought in terms of the liberal education which had been offered in the late nineteenth century, but which had been extended to include other features of the public school. John Henry Newman had held up a liberal education as having a greater purpose:

A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom.¹³

This type of education was about developing critical abilities in the intellect. W. Johnson, Assistant Master at Eton, had argued the importance of forming 'in the boy's mind the habit of weighing and scrutinising general statements and abstract terms'.¹⁴ Liberal education had stressed the importance of a solid grounding in the Classics, although a belief that the curriculum should develop to include emphasis on Mathematics, natural sciences and languages did emerge with the growth of the 'Modern Side' in the public schools of the later nineteenth century. However, even then the Classics were valued

above scientific and technological subjects, a view confirmed by their retention as an entrance requirement for Oxford and Cambridge.¹⁵

Although, unlike in the Elementary schools, there were to be some examinations, the early proponents of public school education had envisaged that they should only be a 'rare interruption to the course of training'.¹⁶ At schools such as Winchester, the emphasis came to be upon giving the boy 'character', which involved the development of 'gentlemanliness', self-discipline and leadership skills.¹⁷ Female educationalists were envious of the manner in which the public schools gave a boy a 'sense of membership of an institution of recognized worth [which] enlarged his life and gave him support and confidence in his after struggles with the world'.¹⁸ As Heward has shown in her study of Ellesmere College, rather than leading to institutionalization, the removal from family was perceived as a positive means of making boys into 'men':

Education at a boarding school meant complete control and supervision of a boy's life and the influences upon him.... No time was wasted in travelling and habits of order and discipline were instilled through an all-embracing daily routine.¹⁹

Another aspect of the 'manliness' essential for the future members of the elite was the promotion of team sports. The 'games cult' had initially developed as a means of encouraging discipline, but for many schools a greater significance had emerged.²⁰ Honey has shown how a school's 'reputation came to depend in part on its games record', so that in some schools playing games was 'treated as though it were the main business of life'.²¹ According to Mangan, the 'ideology of athleticism' was the 'wheel round which the moral

values turned.’²² The masculine ideal of ‘Muscular Christianity’ which emerged from the emphasis on athleticism became ‘part of the new ideology of imperialism with its great pride in the supremacy of the British army and the power of the empire’.²³ If Worcester College boys were not to be excluded by the hegemonic masculinity, they would have to show their athleticism and challenge the stereotype of the blind described in Chapter Two.

However, an unchallenging imitation of the features of public school education could present other problems which would question its suitability for a College preparing blind boys to integrate into adult life. The schools were not without their critics. Arthur Hope and Cyril Norwood, then at Bristol Grammar School, stated in 1909:

They [the schools] generally produce a race of well-bodied, well-mannered, well-meaning boys, keen at games, devoted to their school, ignorant of life, contemptuous of all outside the pale of their own caste, uninterested in work, neither desiring nor revering knowledge.²⁴

This would not appear to be an example which would prepare the boys for citizenship and taking their place within society. Nevertheless, the headmaster of Worcester would have challenged these negative views of what the public schools produced. Brown admired ‘the stability of Victorian days’ and promoted the idea ‘that the community exists for the benefit of the individual.’²⁵ On his retirement he reflected the views of the pre-1914 era by stating:

I wish that you may have always the wisdom to seek the beautiful things of life and the strength to achieve them.²⁶

By 1920, Worcester had lost its old title of 'school for the blind sons of gentlemen', but Brown continued to promote the public school ethos. Establishing a school for the blind which would promote these ideas would be a challenge for the headmaster; and it can be argued that such a philosophy, which in many public schools was focused towards preparing its pupils to be the soldiers and administrators of the British Empire, should have had limited applicability. However, giving his blind boys the values of the upper classes was just part of the strategy Brown will be shown to have adopted in order to provide the advantages they would require to take a place amongst the elite in the 1920s.

4.2 Creating and maintaining the image of a Public School for Blind Boys

As they entered the post-war era, the decision-makers of Worcester College faced the challenge of how they could confront some of the stereotypes of the blind and ensure elite status. Benefiting from publicity given to blinded veterans of the Great War, as Chapter Two has shown, might produce sympathy and money but it would not necessarily provide opportunities for their students in the future. If Brown was to ensure a position of prestige as a public, rather than a private, school, there had to be a change in the image promoted as much as in the curriculum offered.

There was a deliberate policy of imitating public school practices. They already had the school hymn, and, in 1920, the crest of the Commandery (the original location of the school) was adapted to become the school badge, thereby giving a sense of historical roots.²⁷ Six months later, at the suggestion of Canon Southwell of the Governors, the

College adopted 'Possunt quia posse videntur' from the *Aeneid* as a motto.²⁸ This is usually translated as, 'They can because they think they can', but the more literal translation is 'They can because they seem to be able'. This might have been unintentional in the thinking of the Canon, but, perhaps, is more suggestive of the importance of image in altering perceptions in society.

The source of the quote was also important for acceptance amongst an educated elite familiar with the Classics. The *Aeneid* was the tale of how a great empire had grown from small roots, but more pertinently the quote referred to a rowing race. This sport, popular with the public schools, was going to be critical to Brown's vision of his school. Every boy who could 'grasp an oar was obliged to try his hand at rowing', to the extent that, of forty-one photographs in the 1928 prospectus, eight were devoted to rowing, accompanied by two pages of text.²⁹ For a public school such as Shrewsbury, 'Rowing cemented its social and educational superiority in the exclusive network of relationships between Oxford, Cambridge and Henley.'³⁰ Such links would be invaluable for a secondary school for the blind. The College fours and eights were able to compete against other secondary schools without any necessary adaptation, as was evident in the prominence of the photograph of the Henley Regatta at the front of the prospectus (Illustration 4-A).

Rowing assisted in the creation of the appropriate image for a 'public schoolboy'.

In the inter-war period, 'physical fitness, courage and daring' were the keys to demonstrating masculinity in Heward's study of Ellesmere College.³¹ The element of 'daring' could be shown in a carefully posed photograph of younger boys being boisterous on a see-saw (Illustration 4-B), but with the promotion of rowing, Worcester College was going out of its way to reassure parents who would have suffered an enhanced level of

middle class fear and anxiety; they would have wished to feel that their sons were not held back by an additional perceived 'stigma' of disability in their struggle to become part of the masculine elite.

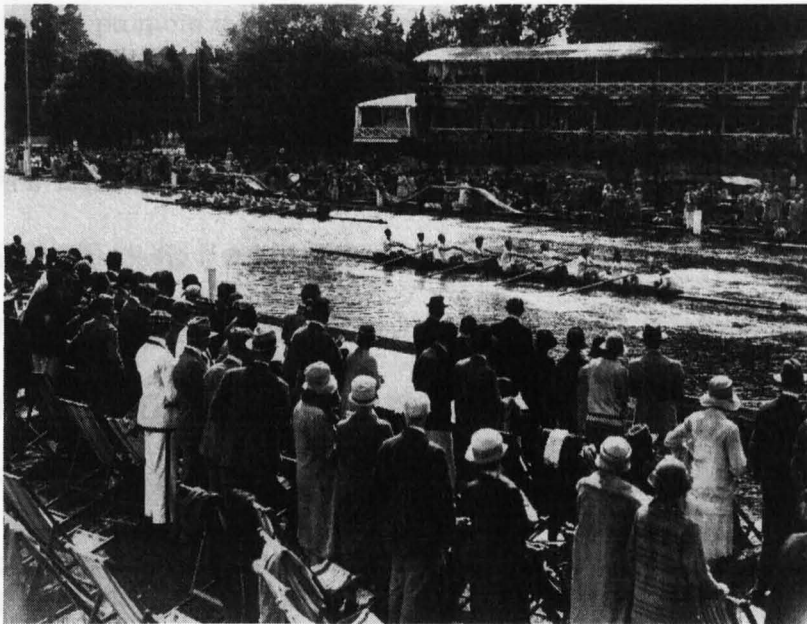


Illustration 4-A: The Worcester College 1st Rowing Eight competing at Henley Regatta, 1927.³²



Illustration 4-B: The boys at play, although they have all been made to look at the camera. School prospectus, 1928.

In nineteenth-century public schools, Honey has shown how gentlemen were expected to be accomplished in ball-games, and Brown's wartime prospectus included Illustration 4-C showing the boys playing cricket. The angle chosen appears to suggest the normality of the match, rather than its adapted form; as acknowledged by the London Society when they pointed out that the ball shown in a photograph of cricket at its elementary school was 'made of cane or willow with balls inside'.³³ By the late 1920s Brown appears to have decided to resolve the problem of demonstrating equality by only promoting the sports in which his students could compete without modifications so that they could be seen as equivalent to their fully-sighted peers.³⁴ Cricket became an informal recreation for 'pleasure', and the prospectus only listed games in which 'the boys compete against other Public Schools and their clubs'.³⁵ Sport had become the measure for demonstrating the extent to which Worcester College was going outside traditional models of disability.



Illustration 4-C: Cricket during the first years of Brown.

The headmaster followed the sports provided in a public school, not only for their own sake, but also for the ethos and contacts they promoted. When Brown went to New York in 1931 to attend the first World Conference on Work for the Blind, he stressed his goals and the ambition his school was striving to inspire:

In the official games I include only those which can be brought to the same level of excellence as those of the schools for the sighted, and in which competition may take place on equal terms with the schools for the sighted....These games ... enable [the boy] to keep in constant contact with the seeing world. This proves, too, that excellence is merely a matter of opportunity.³⁶

For these reasons chess was also encouraged. The school competed in local and national competitions, and paid to bring chess champions to the school to play their own and other local secondary students.³⁷ The significance this represented is evident in the page and six photographs devoted to chess in the 1928 prospectus, compared with the seven photographs of the classrooms and one of a school play.

The boys were rejecting the world of the schools for the blind schools by being made to emulate the public school teams as much as possible. Members of the first rowing crew were allowed to wear a white blazer and had a special diet and training before regattas. They even posed for the institutionally approved hierarchical photographs, typical of public schools (Illustration 4-D). The students were 'gentlemen' conforming to the standards of a hierarchical society. This spread to other activities, with the College Dance Band presented as gentleman amateurs not being paid, but taking 'praiseworthy steps', according

to the *Melody Maker* of 1935, to ensure a professional, or semi-professional, band was not cut out by insisting that another band was employed for any of their engagements.³⁸



Illustration 4-D: The first rowing 'eight' outside the headmaster's house.³⁹

Brown's success in establishing Worcester's position amongst the elite, and outside the ranks of the elementary schools for the blind, was indicated in 1932 when Worcester was elected as a Public Schools Year Book School by the HMC, with the headmaster also qualifying for election to the Headmasters' Conferences.⁴⁰ In order to gain membership a school had to be 'independent' and send an adequate number of students to Oxford and Cambridge. The public schools formed the backbone of the HMC, and, by 1939, the *News Chronicle* was describing the school as the 'Eton of the Blind'.⁴¹

Another indicator of status was the ability to have some prestigious names on the Board of Governors. The Cobham family of Hagley Hall, as the most local representatives of the aristocracy, took the most active role, but other governors included Earl Plymouth and the Worcestershire MP, Stanley Baldwin. When he joined the Governors in 1924 Baldwin was out of office, but he became Prime Minister again at the end of the year. He preserved his link with the school, becoming a Vice-President and opening the new buildings in 1938, although he does not appear to have attended any meetings.⁴²

Brown had been successful in establishing his school amongst the elite, but another feature which an historical study demonstrates is the importance of change, and, for Worcester College to preserve its position by the 1930s, it needed to adapt to developments taking place elsewhere in the public schools. However, Brown and his staff had maintained his interpretation of the Edwardian public school. On the small staff of Worcester College, there was perhaps not much contact with developments in education and society. The employment of Reginald Bonham and L.C.R. Balding straight from Oxford was perhaps reflective of the nature of an independent school which did not place an emphasis on teaching qualifications. Brown was out of sympathy with, what he referred to as, the emergence of an 'epoch of excessive State-consciousness'.⁴³ The Brown prospectus of 1928 continued to focus predominantly upon achievement for individual fulfilment with the aim that a boy:

Shall become independent and able to earn his living in a congenial manner;...

Shall learn hobbies and acquire interests that will make his life fuller for himself and more useful to others.⁴⁴

This was all despite the fact that other public schools had changed as a result of the impact of the horrors of trench warfare in the First World War. While many were still preparing students for the armed forces, with nearly nine per cent of Malvern College boys going directly into the services on leaving in the late 1920s, the old ethos of individual glory and unquestioning sacrifice for the country had come to be questioned.⁴⁵ A public school such as Bembridge could be established with the aim of creating ‘citizens, fitted to discharge the duties of life with a knowledge of the problems of their own country’ and having the ‘impulse towards unselfish work for the good of others’.⁴⁶ The ‘ideal of service to the community’ was to grow, and, for eugenists, could be a means of demonstrating Galton’s ‘civic worth’. Such ideas of social contribution do not fit with a traditional perception of the dependent blind, but presented opportunities for a new head to take a view of citizenship to which blind boys could more effectively contribute.⁴⁷

When Bradnack took control in 1938, he adapted to the alterations in emphasis. As will be shown in Chapter Eight, his influences came from a different era to Brown, and preparation for citizenship was evident as a goal in Bradnack’s 1939 prospectus:

The Aim of the College is to give every boy full scope for the development of all his faculties, mental and spiritual, and so to enable him to become not only economically independent but socially and culturally a useful citizen of his country and of the world.⁴⁸

Bradnack showed more concern for procedures, structures and service within the school. Discipline was highly important for the new headmaster. Despite having only around fifty pupils at this time, the new Headmaster created a prefect and house system. The prefect system was seen by the public schools as a vital part of the training which the schools were providing for leadership and independence.⁴⁹

Also, by the end of the 1930s, competition from the grammar schools had caused the public schools to place more stress upon examinations. For Bradnack, academic standards were the key to the school keeping its status and pupils and this was evident in the prospectus he introduced in 1939, and used, with only minor amendments, into the 1950s. Visually the prospectus was very different from that of Brown with a functional outline in text form being produced, with photographs being relegated to placement in a folder on the back cover.⁵⁰ There was far less emphasis on sport, with only one of the twelve photographs showing rowing. Of more importance was the academic education provided (Illustration 4-E) and the facilities; highlighting the new Baldwin wing which had been built largely as a consequence of the increased confidence which had come with the backing of the NIB. Worcester's prospectus was showing that this school did not have some of the problems of the local schools for the blind, with poor facilities and overcrowding.⁵¹ The emphasis was more in line with prospectuses produced outside special education, and for middle class parents, perhaps already familiar with the teaching rooms and buildings prominent in those produced by public and grammar schools, Bradnack was suggesting an equivalence of educational standards.⁵²

By working within the contexts of the eras in which they began their headships, Brown and Bradnack were concerned to demonstrate their school's credentials amongst elite public

schools. By doing this, Worcester College was showing itself as completely distinct from the elementary schools and workshops for the blind whose aims appeared focused on ensuring that the blind should not be a burden to society and a 'public nuisance'; the education of Worcester boys was to be seen as aimed at individual fulfilment and making a contribution as citizens.⁵³

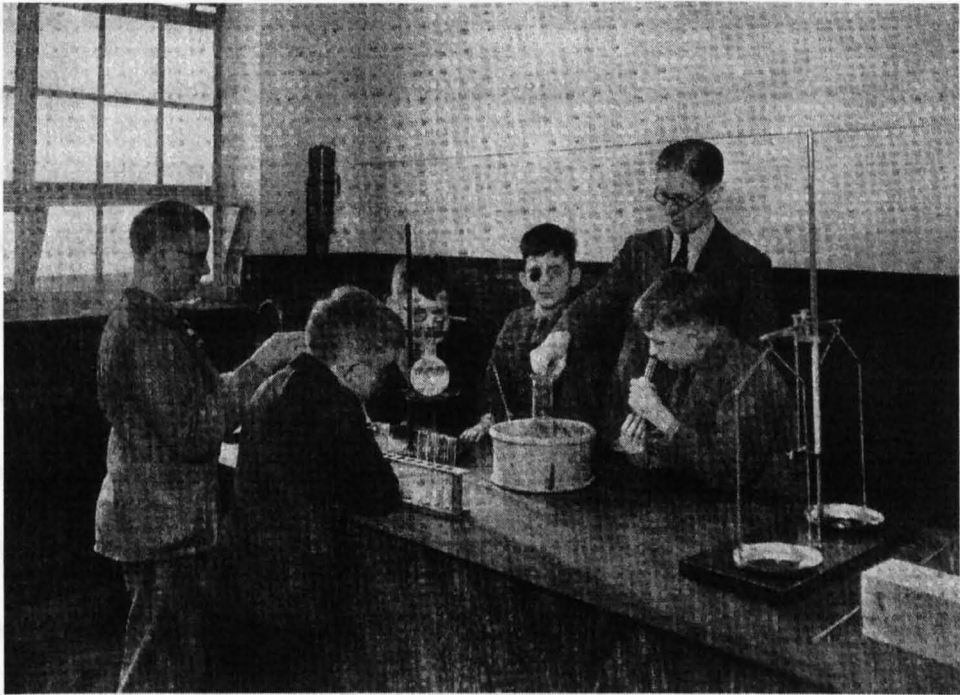


Illustration 4-E: A Science lesson taking place in a classroom in the new wing.⁵⁴

4.3 A school for a narrow elite?

Through following the public school model, Worcester College may have provided the boys with opportunities far beyond those available to those who attended the elementary schools for the blind, but a college which had been set up for the 'blind sons of gentlemen' did little to challenge the existing class divisions. Again there was a paralleling of the mainstream practice of 'hierarchical' provision.⁵⁵ Secondary and higher education had

been reserved by the middle and upper classes for themselves and, at a time when just 11.8 per cent of all children attended a grant-aided secondary school, the assumption for most of the blind was that they did not require secondary education.⁵⁶ Some LEAs could not see the point of supporting the expense of secondary education as they believed that a 'blind boy's future demanded training in handwork, and that brain work would lead nowhere'.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Brown, out of motives of sheer survival, did make a start in broadening the school's clientele, although, as will be shown in Chapter Eight, this was not to have a significant impact until State attitudes changed under the impact of the Second World War.

By the 1930s, the school was not as elitist as may be assumed by the high level of its fees. In April 1919, the governors implemented the Board of Education's views on 'the national character of the College', passing the resolution: 'Whenever there are sufficient vacancies at the College and funds available ... the Governing Body may admit to the College male persons handicapped by blindness who are not of the classes as defined.'⁵⁸ In the inter-war period, the school did utilise scholarships and charitable funds to support students and also looked at opportunities for help in gaining funding to assist the boys when they went on to university.⁵⁹ By 1931, the full fees of only ten boys were paid by parents, with twenty-seven students supported at least in part by LEAS.⁶⁰

As a result, in the 1930s, there were a few students from working- and lower middle-class backgrounds. Fathers included a carpenter, an unemployed miner, a butcher and a clerk.⁶¹ Victor, a working-class boy who joined the College in 1928, felt that class background was irrelevant to his life as a pupil and he was not aware of other boys being from the upper-classes.⁶² However, the working-class boys were greatly outnumbered by those whose fathers were from higher status groups, in the professions or owning companies or farms.

To go to the school the higher classes had a great advantage. Many students had to have their parents contribute at least part of their fees. Also, parents had to be able to fight against an assumed placement at a more local school for the blind. In this case, middle class parents were more likely to be aware of the school's existence, purely through having better access to information and often the educational background to look for and fight for a secondary school placement. Victor rated himself as fortunate in that his parents had the support of an employer who was close to the family, and whose new wife was from Worcester and knew the College. His teacher had recommended that he would benefit from a secondary education. Even then his mother and father still had to push his local authority of Barrow to allow him to be sent out of the home area.⁶³

Despite the school's attempts to build up its numbers, very few boys from elementary schools for the blind were able to benefit as a result of the reluctance of inter-war LEAs to see the potential advantage for such pupils of a secondary school placement. Changes in attitudes at the Board of Education were going to be essential before all blind boys would get the chance to gain secondary schooling.

4.4 Delivering a liberal secondary education to blind boys

For those able to gain funding, Worcester College has been recognised by both traditional historians, such as Cole, and post-revisionists, such as French, as going outside the special school model in not offering an inferior education.⁶⁴ At the end of the First World War considerable emphasis was placed on the full curriculum that it offered, but, in fact, contrary to many of the assumptions which have been made about the superiority of the education provided, the standard and level of the teaching into the early 1930s was far from consistent. In the early years of Brown's headmastership, Mowatt has been reported to have

had concerns about the 'shortcomings' of a curriculum which did not attempt to provide higher education. He wished to use his influence as a governor to remedy this and improve the College's 'general tone and usefulness'.⁶⁵ Lonsdale, as Mowatt's biographer, was attempting to play up his background of service before he was given a healing ministry by the Archbishop of Canterbury, but the 1915, 1924 and 1931 Inspection Reports do indicate some limitations in the education offered. This was partly because without sufficient guaranteed funding the curriculum, and support which could be offered, was limited. However, the need to deliver an academic curriculum perceived to be the equal of mainstream provision created pressures which worked against the delivery of the fully appropriate programme required to gain all the skills necessary for success in adult life. This raises the question which will be assessed over the next few sections of this chapter of whether a school forced by external pressures to adopt a mainstream model was truly enabling the students rather than just presenting them as able to compete.

Worcester College was demonstrating its distinctiveness by going outside the vocational training emphasised in the standard model of special education (described in Chapter Two) and teaching its boys the traditional public school subjects. The curriculum was based around English, History, Mathematics and Ancient and Modern Languages; French, Latin and Greek were part of the standard offer, but some students were also able to take German or Spanish. The standards of these were rated in 1924 as 'creditable to any secondary school'.⁶⁶ The restricted nature and emphasis of such an academic programme was not unusual. In 1924, King's School in Worcester had five students who gained Higher Certificate, three in Classics and one each in Modern Languages and Mathematics and the Headmaster could boast without a fear of his school's image being lessened:

We are a school whose special attention in more advanced work is devoted to Classics without neglecting general subjects for all up to School Certificate stage.⁶⁷

The education Worcester College offered was certainly a great deal in advance of what was expected, and permissible, at other elementary schools for the blind. When an attempt was made to introduce a small amount of work in French at the BRIB Carpenter Road School in the late 1930s, the Board of Education made clear their disapproval of such an addition to the curriculum; officials took the view that 'the standard of work attained in English subjects was not sufficiently advanced for a second language to be attempted'.⁶⁸

In addition to Classics, Brown had specialised in Mathematics and he took a great interest in the problems which algebra and book-keeping presented to the blind, developing an adapted graph board and a book-keeping frame to assist tuition.⁶⁹ When a former student and Oxford mathematics graduate, Reg Bonham, was appointed to the staff to teach Mathematics, this also seems to have resulted in innovation with the development of a trigonometry board which enabled the drawing of 'tolerably accurate figures' [Appendix B].⁷⁰

However, there were weaknesses in the school's approach which were not recognised by Pritchard who assumed that the school was simply providing 'higher education'.⁷¹ There was an avoidance of those areas of the curriculum which provided practical challenges. The teaching in the 1920s and early 1930s must have been predominantly orally-based if the inspectors of 1931 could claim that no special qualifications, not even a knowledge of Braille, were required to teach in the school. In 1915, there was no general provision for

manual training, with carpentry only. being taught if an additional fee was paid.⁷² Inspectors also felt that the potential of plasticine and clay for relief maps was being ignored. In 1924, there was only a short course in Geography, and the 1931 Inspectors complained that the subject was only taught in the second and third forms with criticism of the teaching's 'lifelessness and lack of method'.⁷³

Science was reported in 1915 as being restricted to a study of physiology with 'no serious effort to organise a course of science for school'.⁷⁴ With Dr. Eichholz being involved, the Inspectors cannot be accused of being uninformed and unrealistic in their views when they reckoned that apparatus could be devised to illustrate key concepts such as dynamics and the laws of sound.⁷⁵ They reported that 'Nature study' as a basis for Biology was being done in most elementary schools, and so lack of a laboratory should not be an obstacle.⁷⁶ In 1924, Science teaching remained limited. Only a short course was offered in Physics, although the reason given was that the 'boys' interests hardly seem to lie in that direction'. This could have been self-perpetuating, a consequence of lack of tuition failing to stimulate a demand. W.H.B. Higby in 1921 did become the first blind Student to pass Responsions for Oxford University in Practical Chemistry. However, this may have been a triumph for Brown's coaching after another school's teaching, rather than the Worcester College's Science programme, as Higby was only at the school for three years.⁷⁷ The 1931 inspectors considered that the curriculum was more restricted than the 'peculiar circumstances of the school would seem to warrant'.⁷⁸

There were challenging 'circumstances' which did hinder the delivery of a fully comparable education. Both Worcester and Chorleywood College for Girls did struggle with some of the limitations of Braille devices available and, a perennial problem in an era

when every page had to be reproduced by hand, there were problems in acquiring a sufficient number of Braille books.⁷⁹ Also, the school's lack of adequate financial backing restricted staff numbers and low wages prevented the employment of a full team of university graduates. Most of the criticism levelled in 1931 was aimed at staff who were poorly qualified, or who had been at the school for a quarter of a century with no opportunity for further professional development. The need to maintain numbers meant that there were few stipulations for entrance, but this complicated the process of developing a curriculum capable of meeting the needs of the 'range of ages, mental power, and attainments on admission'.⁸⁰

As a response to the needs of some students, a Commercial course was designed as preparation for work in commercial houses; the curriculum included shorthand, typing, Economics, Accountancy, Banking and Commercial law. Students were entered for Royal Society of Arts examinations, which offered qualifications in shorthand and typing, as well as the London Intermediate Examination in Arts and Junior and Senior Certificates of the London Chamber of Commerce for Commercial students being offered later.⁸¹ The course was still being developed in the late 1920s, and there does seem to have been a problem of lack of expertise in its delivery.⁸²

The ability range of the boys in such a small school was to cause particular problems for examinations. Barnard, the headmaster before Brown, had been keen to enter as many students as possible for the Higher and Lower certificates of the Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination. However, Brown was slow to use the School and Higher Certificates which were introduced in 1917. To a considerable extent, this reluctance was a result of the large number of boys who entered at the school at sixteen with no knowledge

of Greek, Latin, French or Mathematics; Brown stated to the Governors that this made it impossible to do more than prepare these students for Responsions and other university entrance exams.⁸³ Nevertheless, the record of the College for this form of assessment was very good, with all six students who took Responsions in 1921 passing, compared to a national average where seventy-five per cent had failed.⁸⁴

External pressures were to cause Brown to change his policy and adopt nationally-recognised qualifications. By the 1930s, School Certificate was to be the main qualification taken, even for many sixth formers seeking additional subjects. School Certificate had been designed as a school-leaving examination taken around the age of sixteen, but with the acquisition of seven credits, it did allow for matriculation to university. Local schools such as King's started entering their boys from the early 1920s, perhaps increasing the demand for Worcester College boys to gain the qualification.⁸⁵ Parents paying fees had often made a significant commitment. Heward has shown how, 'bringing up sons was an important family enterprise to which a significant part of the family's energy and resources was devoted.'⁸⁶ As a consequence, at Ellesmere the parents were 'looking for academic qualifications and discipline.'⁸⁷ Worcester College parents, and the LEAs, would have expected comparability of academic results from a school that advertised itself as a public school for boys.

When Brown adopted examinations it was done in a way that would enable academic success. Initially School Certificate at Worcester was based around the literary subjects of History, English and Scripture, as well as Languages, including Oral French. Some form of Mathematics had to be offered but it was only later that Advanced Mathematics was added. In the first year reported, there was only one failure with five students passing with

credits in six subjects. In 1936, there was an eighty percent pass rate, compared to sixty per cent nationally.⁸⁸ After the changes in staffing resulting from the 1931 Inspection, Geography and Science were taught with success to School Certificate level; although they were still seen as the 'Cinderella' subjects.⁸⁹

Following on from the success in School Certificate, Higher Certificate came to be examined in the 1930s. It was designed to be taken two years later and allowed specialisation on an advanced course. This was to become an entrance to a university honours course, although, with only five students recorded as gaining the qualification, it seems to have been used by Brown primarily for students seeking scholarships; it was not necessary otherwise for Oxford entrance. Mathematics was to prove more difficult for students than English. It was offered, but the one student, who began the course in 1935, failed to complete. Other students did History and Geography, as well as Latin, French and English.⁹⁰

Despite its limited curriculum, and the problems of grouping in a small school with a wide ability range, Worcester College could be judged a success by the standards of the era for secondary schools as it did enable twenty-five pupils to meet the requirements for matriculation and go up to take degrees at the universities in the 1920s.⁹¹ Even the critical inspection of 1931 praised the number of scholarships gained, and recognised that the level of academic achievement was due to Brown's teaching.⁹² Whilst a school which could be more selective such as Rugby School sent fifty-seven per cent of students directly to university in 1933, Worcester's success rate of thirty-one per cent for 1930 to 1939 compares favourably with Malvern College's twenty-six per cent from 1927 to 1930 and Ellesmere College's twenty per cent between 1928 and 1931.⁹³ The opportunity for

academic success was there for blind boys and this was to be critical to the acquisition of grammar school status in 1944, a development which will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

4.5 Creating appropriate skills for adult life

Despite the success in getting the boys to pass examinations, Worcester needed to do much more in order to enable the boys to be active citizens. The problem for a school, having to adopt a mainstream model and ensure academic achievement to maintain its higher status, was that the development of other skills and qualities could be ignored.

Outside the school curriculum, the additional activities offered did help to boost confidence and prepare students for their adult lives. Whereas a student at King's School Worcester in the 1920s felt frustration at the emphasis on work and games to the detriment of the 'other things' of 'after-life' such as dancing and social entertainment, students of Worcester College were given the opportunity to participate in the Dance Band and the activities of the College Union, which included drama, talks and an annual ball.⁹⁴ Worcester students did participate in rowing and chess at university, and also benefited from an 'old boys' network'; one former student commented that of equal importance to 'preparation' from school was guidance provided once they reached university by former students who were already established.⁹⁵

Brown did believe in the importance of individual development and would have been horrified at Gordon and Humphries' accusation that segregated institutions regimented the recipients, working to 'crush individual personalities...[and] shape them into a narrow and rigidly conformist mould.'⁹⁶ Brown was not a feared, stern headmaster who could be accused of attempting to 'crush' student individuality. Brown's approach seems to have

inspired a lasting affection as former students were to decide after his death to have his grave tended and a school clock purchased as a memorial. It was Mowatt and other governors who intervened and threatened the boys with action because they considered that general standards of behaviour had deteriorated, interfering in areas that would usually be the responsibility of a headmaster.⁹⁷ Bradnack's control of the school was very different, but, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Eight, his more frequent use of the cane was in line with public school practice.⁹⁸ The sound of the headmaster's steel-capped shoes inspired fear and respect. The introduction of prefects brought responsibilities and a discipline which led to a discontent which does not suggest the ability to subdue individual spirit. Dissatisfaction with the dismissal of prefects was to lead during the early war years, when knowledge of the full extent of the horrors of Nazi rule were not grasped, to the production of an unofficial magazine entitled 'Akshun'. This was supposedly an account of life in 'Worcester Concentration camp'. They satirised the leadership of Herr Bradler, with the co-editors 'nearly expelled for producing it'.⁹⁹ The background was the "taming" of the school' by Bradnack, who one of the writers was later to admit, 'had a tough job ... in imposing some degree of discipline.'¹⁰⁰ However, students to some extent triumphed over an over-regimented public school by dint of their intelligence. The perpetrators were apparently some of the senior students in the school, and pupil numbers were not large enough to lose the prestige of such boys going on to Oxford.

Where students were less enabled, and perhaps even disabled, was in some of their skills for coping independently. The school appeared to make no concessions to the nature of its students in the creation of its curriculum, wishing instead to create the impression that there was 'no indication' that it was 'different to any other public school in the country'.¹⁰¹ When a *News Chronicle* representative arrived in 1939, they commented that students were

allowed out, but, in an era before mobility training, no 'walking stick or any other kind of aid to the Blind' could be seen around the College. Bradnack explained the 'miracles ... that happen hourly' as being a result of the manner in which 'their remaining senses are developed'; Bradnack argued that the blind could make a 'special contribution to civilisation' but it was on terms which required no special adaptations from the society around them.¹⁰²

There was also no recognition that other domestic skills would need to be taught and this was again a reflection of prevalent attitudes towards masculinity. Domestic chores were seen as 'the antithesis of manliness', so that preparation for life was merely seen by the 1930s headmaster of any Public School in terms of gaining the skills needed to take a leading role in society.¹⁰³ The assumption was that public school men would marry or have a maid who could carry out domestic chores. At Ellesmere, there was resentment during the war when a lack of domestic staff created a need for pupils to lay the tables; boys considered they were not at school to learn such domestic skills.¹⁰⁴ Heward has considered that, 'The subordination of women in the domestic service of men, learned at home, was strongly reinforced by the school';¹⁰⁵ Brown and Bradnack do not appear to have considered any need to think differently.

Instead of teaching domestic skills the approach of Worcester College appears to have been to provide a self-belief which allowed dependence on the sighted. 'When I was blinded as a child,' T. E. Utley, a former student, told a fellow journalist, 'I could operate competently as a blind man and become a switchboard operator, or ruthlessly depend on others to help me achieve what I could have achieved sighted.'¹⁰⁶ Utley admitted that he gained his Cambridge Double First in History and distinguished career by using friends and family

and secretaries and colleagues to read to him and lead him around. The public school model had provided opportunities for academic success for the boys at Worcester, but did leave them ill-equipped in some ways, and thereby reliant on their own wits and abilities, when it came to surviving in the world outside the school.

4.6 The Students and their future Careers

Special schools have been presented by Revisionist writers as preparing their students for a position of inferiority. Borsay has stated that they 'depressed the expectations of all their pupils, irrespective of their social background'.¹⁰⁷ Certainly, as was demonstrated in Chapter Two, many blind people did have problems gaining paid work in the inter-war period. Even ensuring their students could gain employment was an indication of success for Worcester, although, for the College to have succeeded as a public school, it had to prepare the boys to gain the sort of positions which gave status in society. For the parents of the middle classes who aspired to this kind of secondary education, the role of the male was defined:

Manliness was first and foremost about being a good breadwinner, having a high, secure income from a respected occupation, preferably professional.¹⁰⁸

However, providing Worcester students with any access to the professions was an achievement, given the attitude of a society where even in the Board of Education the opinion could be expressed that 'a blind boy could not enter a profession unless he could afford a private secretary'.¹⁰⁹

At the turn of the twentieth century, public schoolmasters looked on their pupils as future soldiers, pioneers, or administrators.¹¹⁰ For Worcester's blind students, roles in the empire appeared closed, and in business much appeared dependent on personal contacts. The difficulties presented by the social context were evident when the Government Inspectors commented that the students were very dependent on the Headmaster and his advisers 'to find them suitable occupation in life'.¹¹¹ The limitations were highlighted early in his headmastership, when Brown was questioned by the Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Students of the time were seeking careers as organists, as well as in Education, the Law and the Church, but Brown considered the careers which could be developed in the future were, 'massage, teaching, free-lance writing and poultry-farming'. He was in agreement when Arthur Pearson asserted the need to preserve a gentlemanly status whilst seizing opportunities which a hierarchical society might present:

'the scope for blind gentlemen is obviously very much smaller than it is for blind men of the working classes, and there is nothing like the number of channels of employment open to them. Do you not think, therefore, that in a place like Worcester you should particularly try to develop in such a way as to lead up to occupations which are suited for gentlemen? – Yes....

It is rather a curious fact...that massage is usually in the hands of a person, who, without wishing to be snobbish, one would not describe as a gentleman.... I believe there is a particularly good opening for the blind masseur of the better class. Do you agree with that view? - Yes, quite.¹¹²

This route into massage was made easier in 1915 when the NIB established its physiotherapy school, with at least twenty students going there between 1920 and 1944. One student was to go on to be the school's Principal. Poultry farming may have been adopted by St. Dunstan's, but the only Worcester boy to try this was later to take work in an office. Two students did go into other areas of pastoral agriculture, but one of these gained an Oxford degree first, so this was presumably the result of a family link.¹¹³ Brown does not appear to have revised his judgement on the boys' prospects through the interwar years. In the late 1930s, he called for 'opportunities for entrance to other careers', but seems to have directed his students towards the well-trodden paths.¹¹⁴ This was a more patrician age and, even students being prepared for an independent adult life, were expected to accept the few options they were given.

In the area of careers, Bradnack went along with Brown's thinking. The 1939 Prospectus stated:

Experience has shown that, for boys whose parents cannot find openings for them, the most suitable careers are to be found in the professions of Massage, the Solicitors branch of the Legal Profession, and (if they have the vocation) the Ministry of the Church.¹¹⁵

Bradnack was highlighting the professional paths students were taking, although some Worcester boys did take the more general routes promoted for the blind. Shorthand typing training offered by the Royal Normal College or the NIB became increasingly important, with one student doing the NIB course in running a kiosk.

For boys being prepared for university entrance, the school authorities did work to promote their advancement. Worcester College for the Blind may not have had the same level of historic links with Oxford and Cambridge Colleges, but personal contacts were undoubtedly used to the benefit of students.¹¹⁶ By the mid-1930s, Theodore Tylor, a Worcester 'old boy', was Estates Bursar of Balliol and had been able to organise statutes covering exams for blind students. Victor, a former student interviewed, recalled that once he had chosen Jurisprudence, Brown and Eagar applied for him and chose Keble. During his fifteen minute interview with the dons, Victor had the impression that the decision had already been made.¹¹⁷

The dominant career for those who went on to university was Law, with at least eighteen students choosing this path. Information was provided to guide students on this route; Victor's decision came as a result of being impressed by a Saturday evening talk given by a local solicitor.¹¹⁸ Becoming a success as a solicitor was not easy in the first half of the twentieth century as financial support was essential for any prospective solicitor and this perpetuated the class nature of the society of the time. Students with a Law degree had two years as an articled clerk during which time they received no salary. Additionally there was a large premium to be paid to the solicitor to whom the student was to be articled and a stamp duty payable on the deed recording the position of articled clerk.¹¹⁹ As one former student was to point out, 'It is a costly business becoming a solicitor ... [but] with luck and good management it should in time ... lead to a successful career'.¹²⁰ For success in private practice, enterprise was necessary; 'Solicitors are very shy about taking a blind man into partnership – but look out for old men about to retire.'¹²¹ Victor received help from Eagar to get a grant from the Gardner's Trust; he went on to work for Bootle, and then

Sefton, preparing legal cases for the Councils in the days before the Crown Prosecution Service.

Students were not encouraged to become barristers because, as former students who went into the Law have asserted, the obstacles were even greater.¹²² A wealthy background was essential to afford the expense of the pupillage and the uncertainty of the early years; the difficulties involved in becoming established would then be compounded by the fear of dealing with an untested blind barrister. One former pupil who did qualify in this era probably went to practise back home in India while another decided to work as a solicitor. Until sufficient numbers of blind solicitors had qualified and were willing to take cases to these barristers, there would be difficulties in creating the reputation essential for later advancement.

When assessing careers, the school authorities cannot be considered to have been preparing their students for a subservient role, but they were being cautious in their view of the practicalities. This was evident when students, such as Bonham, came back as teachers. The attitude to blind members of staff can reflect how effectively there was an enabling attitude for a future role in adult life. In 1931, Brown summed up his attitude to blind men on his staff:

We are not in the least opposed to the principle of the employment of blind teachers, but we find that with their great attention to their handicaps, it is very necessary to have a large proportion of teachers with full sight.¹²³

Unless they wished to go into teaching, students who gained Oxford degrees in French, English or Mathematics in the 1920s and 1930s did have some difficulty in finding a suitable path, with one student then taking a physiotherapy qualification, and others becoming copyists for the National Library for the Blind. A student who gained the Fawcett Scholarship, which was only awarded to a blind student going on to university every four years, initially had to work as a Braille proof-reader before becoming a teacher and tutor.

However, some former students through luck and ability were able to reject the recommended avenues. Alec Templeton followed a musical career, working in the United States as a composer and performer. Another talented musician, John Busbridge, became Director of Music for the RNIB. Others used their literary skills. T. E. Utley became Deputy Editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and, as a result of his work as a political theorist, a speechwriter for Margaret Thatcher. John Heath-Stubbs went into publishing and taught abroad whilst he was building up a reputation as a poet (to the extent of being suggested as a possible Poet Laureate).¹²⁴

Outside the world of employment, students were able to demonstrate their ability to contribute actively in adult life. John Wilson founded the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind and Duncan Watson was to become Chairman of the RNIB and President of the World Blind Union.¹²⁵ Norman Preedy, who had gone into the family business, became Mayor of Dudley.¹²⁶

However, such alternative opportunities to show potential were rare, and there were obstacles resultant from the attitudes of society described in Chapter Two. As will be

demonstrated in Chapter Seven, some ‘disabled’ people, including the former students from Worcester, were to benefit from the needs of the Home Front in the Second World War. These included a Language graduate who got employment as a censor for Braille material being sent abroad. Utley got his break with *The Times* as a leader writer during the war, and Rupert Cross reportedly felt that, if it had not been for the war, he would not have had the chance to get his first teaching post at Oxford.¹²⁷

In the interwar period, the headmasters were conservative in sticking to familiar paths and consolidating on existing positions. Rather than challenging the nature of society, Brown and Bradnack sought the security for their students of professions where the prospects seemed more settled. Worcester College did help to put many of the boys into types of elite occupation, and doing this must have assisted in changing the image of blind people in society. Holes may have been made in the walls excluding the blind from the world of professional work, but, up to 1944, the openings were still restricted.

4.7 Summary: Enabling or Disabling?

Any simplified assessment of either the ‘enabling’ or ‘disabling’ nature of special schools cannot be applied to Worcester College during the inter-war period. The College was working outside the normal models of disability for these years in trying to put its students amongst the elite, although to do this it had to adopt many of the constraints present within elite education. The years before the Butler Act are ones of challenge and a cautious, and in many ways narrow, attempt to further the education of the blind.¹²⁸

Class and views of male gender played a key role in the nature of the education provided at Worcester College. In order to survive in a social and cultural environment that lacked a

broader vision of education for the blind, the school followed a public school model of education. The adoption of the practices of a school for sighted boys does add to the difficulty of judging whether Worcester was truly enabling. Heward found that former students at Ellesmere College were 'glad of their qualifications' but critical of 'aspects of the masculine toughening process'.¹²⁹ There are elements of this in a College for blind boys where there appeared to be little concern for pastoral care.

The prospectus claimed to 'give boys that "Victory over blindness" which shows itself in self-confidence, independence of help and management of their own affairs'.¹³⁰ The success of former students in becoming 'citizens' by finding work and playing a role on a local, or even national, level can suggest a certain success. However, the need to conform to society's expectations was a disabling factor in preparing students for other aspects of the outside world beyond the strictly academic path to university entrance and the future prospect of professional employment.

Nevertheless, judging in the context of the inter-war period, the impact of Worcester College can be evaluated through the respect with which it was held nationally and internationally. As will be shown in Chapter Seven, Worcester College had established its position sufficiently to play a part in wartime discussions of the future structure of education for the blind in England and Wales. The importance of the College was recognised by a visitor from the oldest school for the blind in the world, the Valentin Haüy school in Paris, who described the manner in which Worcester offered the boys a level of education unavailable to their French disabled peers. Although the economic priorities of this observer became obvious by his reference to 'activité normale and productive', he was

impressed by the way in which Brown was preparing his students to be ‘citoyens utiles, en tout point semblables aux autres citoyens’.¹³¹

4.8 References

¹ Bell, 40. Rose, 36. Payne, 215, 222.

² French, 'Rainbow', 73.

³ Heward, 52, 10.

⁴ Robertson, 76.

⁵ Term used by McCulloch, 'Middle Classes', see Chapter 1.2.

⁶ Cook et al, 296.

⁷ NCWFSA email forum.

⁸ For local communities, the 'blind institution became a symbol comparable to the railway station', in J. Oliphant, 'Empowerment and Debilitation in the Educational Experience of the Blind in Nineteenth-Century England and Scotland,' *History of Education* 35, no. 1 (2006): 26.

⁹ McCulloch, 'Middle Classes': 700-1.

¹⁰ WCB Gov Mins, 2/8/1912. Ritchie was interviewed before the post had been advertised. For the implications of Ritchie's move to the London Society see Chapter Seven.

¹¹ G. Upcott, *Memories 1891-1920 As It Was* (Privately circulated, Braille copy Royal National Library Service, 1963), Braille Vol. 2, 2.

¹² Deed of Trust 14/8/1936 ED32/1274 NA.

¹³ J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (1852), 101. [book online] The National Institute for Newman Studies; <http://www.newmanreader.org/> (10/9/2009)

¹⁴ W. Johnson, 'On the Education of the Reasoning Faculties,' in F. W. Farrar (ed.), *Essays on a Liberal Education* (London: MacMillan, 1867), 345.

¹⁵ Roach, 244.

¹⁶ Farrar, 347.

¹⁷ T.J.H. Bishop and R. Wilkinson, *Winchester and the Public School Elite* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 19.

¹⁸ Address by Mrs Sidgwick (Principal of Newnham College) on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of Roedean School, 26th July 1897. Educational Box 7, John Johnson Collection (JJC), Bodleian Library.

¹⁹ Heward, 51

²⁰ J. Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, (London: Millington, 1977), 109.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

²² Mangan, 9.

²³ Humphries and Gordon, 25.

²⁴ C. Norwood and A. Hope, *The Higher Education of Boys in England* (London: John Murray, 1909), 187.

²⁵ Farewell Letter, *Pimpernel* (1938), 4, 5. NCW.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ WCB Governors' Minutes, 14/7/1920.

²⁸ Virgil, *Aeneid*, V, line 231.

²⁹ Anonymous former student of 1913, 'Early Days at Worcester', WCB Prospectus 1928. BA 12004 WRO.

³⁰ Heward, 48.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³² B4, NCW.

³³ Royal London Society for teaching the blind to read, 'One hundred years ago 1838-1938'. Charitable Societies Box 1 JJC. NCW archive contains a wicker ball.

³⁴ Honey, 115: Royal London Society for teaching the blind to read, 'One hundred years ago 1838-1938'. Charitable Societies Box 1 JJC.

³⁵ WCB *Prospectus*, 1928, BA 12004 WRO.

³⁶ H. Lende, S. Swift and E. McKay (eds), *Proceedings of the World Conference on Work for the Blind* (New York: AFB, 1932), 89-90.

³⁷ In 1920, fees and expenses for a visiting chess master amounted to over £80, WCB Gov Mins, 18/1/1921.

³⁸ 'Public School for the Blind that runs a Dance Band', *Melody Maker*, 30/3/1935.

³⁹ B4 NCW.

⁴⁰ Brown never seems to have become a member and certainly did not attend any of the meetings. HMC Annual Meeting Records MSS58/3/3/11 MRC.

⁴¹ *News Chronicle*, 3/6/1939.

⁴² Minutes of Governors' meetings.

⁴³ Farewell Letter, *Pimpernel* (1938), 4.

⁴⁴ WCB *Prospectus*, 1928.

⁴⁵ Malvern College, report of inspection, June 1931. ED109/6730 NA.

⁴⁶ *Bembridge School Prospectus*, c.1928. Education Box 1 JJC.

⁴⁷ Heward, 52.

⁴⁸ WCB *Prospectus*, 1939. BA 12004 WRO.

⁴⁹ Heward, 54.

⁵⁰ WCB *Prospectus*, 1939.

⁵¹ Humphries and Gordon, 67.

⁵² For example, prospectuses for Malvern College, 1937, and Lancing College, 1940. Educational Box 6 JJC.

⁵³ Humphries and Gordon, 68.

⁵⁴ WCB Prospectus, 1939.

⁵⁵ Oliphant, 68.

⁵⁶ Spens Report Secondary Education, 1938, Table 4, 93. Table 1, 88, suggests that 83.5% of 11-14 year olds were at elementary schools.

⁵⁷ Interview memo after the Report of 1931, ED32/382

⁵⁸ WCB Gov Mins, 29/4/1919.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21/7/1921. Contributions to fees were available from organisations such as the Gardner's Trust and Ex-Servicemen's Fund.

⁶⁰ 1931 report, ED32/832 NA.

⁶¹ Student files, NCW.

⁶² Interview Victor.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Cole, 79: French, *Oral History*, 115.

⁶⁵ Lonsdale, 16.

⁶⁶ Copy of Letter and Report received from the Board of Education, 1/12/1924, SA|NCW.

⁶⁷ *Vigornian Worcester Cathedral King's School Chronicle* IX (December 1924), III.

⁶⁸ BRIB Minute Book House and Education Committees 16/6/1938. MS 1700/1/5/7 Birm.

⁶⁹ WCB Prospectus, 1928, NCW.

⁷⁰ WCB Inspection Report by HM Inspectors and a Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education, 1-4 February 1955, 11. ED195/99 NA.

⁷¹ Pritchard, 200.

⁷² Board Report, 1915, 7.

⁷³ Board Report, 1924: Inspection Report 1931, ED32/832 NA.

⁷⁴ Inspection Report 1915, 7.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 2.2.

⁷⁶ Inspection Report 1915, 7.

⁷⁷ WCB Gov Mins, 29/11/1921.

⁷⁸ Inspection Report 1931.

⁷⁹ WCB Gov mins, 25/1/1918.

⁸⁰ Medical officer's Report 1927, ED32/832 NA, 4.

⁸¹ WCB Gov Mins, 25/7/1925 and 9/7/1929.

⁸² Report of visit, 11/3/1931, ED32/832 NA.

⁸³ Headmaster's Report 19/7/1923, WCB Gov Mins.

⁸⁴ WCB Gov Mins, 29/11/1921.

⁸⁵ Brown's son was at King's in the early 1920s. Viscount Cobham was a guest at the Speech Day of 1923.

⁸⁶ Heward, 10.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸⁸ Headmaster's Report, WCB Gov Mins.

⁸⁹ *Pimpernel* (1938).

⁹⁰ WCB Gov Mins: *Pimpernel*.

⁹¹ This was nearly one-third of the students who left in the 1920s.

⁹² Inspection Report 1931.

⁹³ Inspection reports Rugby School Nov. 1933, ED109/6457, Malvern 1931, and Ellesmere College Dec. 1931. ED109/4944 NA.

⁹⁴ Letter from Terpsichore, Vigornian Worcester Cathedral King's School Chronicle (July 1922): *Pimpernel* (1938), 17-8.

- ⁹⁵ Bonham won an Oxford chess competition and rowed for his College: Interview Victor.
- ⁹⁶ Gordon and Humphries, 68.
- ⁹⁷ WCB Gov Mins 16/1/1921. There were reports of bad language and spirits being drunk.
- ⁹⁸ Interview Victor.
- ⁹⁹ NCW, Box 30.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, Letter written to David Scott, 18/10/1983.
- ¹⁰¹ *News Chronicle*, 3/6/1939.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid*.
- ¹⁰³ Heward, 112.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 74.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 159.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ruth Dudley Edwards 'Blunkett is torn apart by media hounds', *Sunday Independent*, 6/11/2005.
- ¹⁰⁷ Borsay, *Disability*, 97.
- ¹⁰⁸ Heward, 13
- ¹⁰⁹ Memo 593/09, Interview Board of Education with Eagar, 16/12/1936, ED32/832 NA.
- ¹¹⁰ Roach, 133
- ¹¹¹ 1924 Report.
- ¹¹² *Departmental Committee Welfare*, 170.
- ¹¹³ Student files, NCW: Card index, BA12156, WRO.
- ¹¹⁴ *Birmingham Post* 11/9/1937, ED32/1274 NA.
- ¹¹⁵ WCB Prospectus, 1939.
- ¹¹⁶ New College, Oxford was linked with Winchester College.
- ¹¹⁷ Interview Victor.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Email from Sir John Wall.

¹²⁰ RH Rees, *Pimpernel* (1935), 5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Email Colin Baxter 30/7/2005.

¹²³ Lende et al, *Proceedings*, 89.

¹²⁴ J. Heath-Stubbs, *Hindsights* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993).

¹²⁵ 'Obituary: Sir John Wilson', *The Independent*, 3/12/1999: 'Birthday Honours: Knighthood for former RNIB chairman', *The New Beacon* 77 (September 1993): 912

¹²⁶ Card Index, BA12156 WRO.

¹²⁷ Comment from Colin Baxter, a former student and Law lecturer at Hull University.

¹²⁸ Payne, 397.

¹²⁹ Heward, 55.

¹³⁰ WCB Prospectus 1939.

¹³¹ J. Bronne, 'Une visite au College de Worcester Angleterre' 3 *Le Valentin Haüy* (1932): 50-2, Valentin Haüy School, Paris.

5. Chorleywood College before the 1944 Act. I: Establishing a secondary school for blind girls

Although Worcester College had been providing secondary education for blind boys since 1866, differences in gender perceptions delayed the establishment of a secondary school for blind girls until January 1921. Whereas the last two chapters have looked at the impact of notions of class, disability and male gender on the evolution of the boys' school at Worcester, issues relating to female gender were to work alongside the impact of blindness to play a critical role in the education at Chorleywood. Again an examination of parallels with mainstream practice can highlight the manner in which other factors complicated the strategies adopted by the schools, negating any explanation of special education based around a single thread, whether it was humanitarian progress or 'social control'.¹

The growth of secondary schools for sighted girls did highlight the inequalities that existed for blind girls, but government did not take the lead and the establishment of 'Chorleywood College for girls with little or no sight' was left to the men of the Executive Committee of the NIB. Again the presence of the eminent blind men prominent in Chapters Two and Three would suggest that disabled people have been able to influence some developments in special education. Just as was the case at Worcester, these men were seeking to break away from some of the negative perceptions of blindness by providing the enabling opportunities which came from a secondary education. However, the earlier sections of this chapter will look at the extent to which their perceptions of gender roles led to deviations from the model of a boys' public school described in the last two chapters.

Although earlier histories tended to discuss the blind 'child' and describe developments from which boys were mainly to benefit, as has been shown in Chapter One, writers on 'Disability' have begun to study the influence of gender on the education of girls with sensory impairments.² However, this has tended to be discussed in terms of elementary education, with Borsay demonstrating the way in which the curriculum of schools reproduced 'the division of labour between men and women that characterized society as a whole'; not only was any possibility of advancement through an academic route to the professions precluded, but by teaching girls housecraft skills and boys woodwork, children learnt about their future gender roles.³ Chorleywood College did not aim to limit ambition in such a manner, but the education of blind girls had to conform to different standards to those at Worcester College. A major theme will be an examination of whether the College was conforming to society's assumptions on gender, not as part of a 'disabling agenda' but in order to raise the prospects of their pupils.

The struggle to achieve the position among the elite, which a secondary education could assist in providing, was shown in the last chapter to have produced constraints for the boys. However, as was discussed in Chapter One, the patriarchal influence of men in dominant positions of authority meant that all girls' schools had to be careful of the image they presented.⁴ Men were in a position to perpetuate the different gender expectations of the inter-war period. This chapter will examine how the governors and staff behind Chorleywood attempted to integrate the education provided into the broader social and cultural context of sighted girls' secondary education. The role of the individual agency of Phyllis Monk, the first Headmistress, must be considered as she faced an enormous challenge with the additional economic difficulties, and social and political pressures, caused by the Great War and the Great Depression, as well as the growth of fascism in

Europe. The context of the education of blind girls can only be effectively evaluated in relation to the ambiguities of the position of women.

5.1 The obstacles confronting a school for blind girls

Whilst men such as Taylor and Blair had been prepared to promote the secondary education of blind boys in the nineteenth century, girls had not been provided with the same opportunities and this meant that Chorleywood would have to play a pioneering role. Although the Royal Normal College was taking its students beyond elementary education, its curriculum was focused upon the pursuit of future roles in teaching in elementary schools and music; there was no opportunity for blind girls to acquire the secondary education needed to move onto the university path promoted for their sighted peers by the new girls' schools of the late nineteenth century.⁵ As a consequence, when schooling for the blind became compulsory in 1890, parents had no choice but to place girls in the institutions for the blind where they received an elementary education, or, as was to prove the case for many of the early Chorleywood students, leave them to struggle on with little assistance in a high school or private school.⁶

The decisions and recommendations responsible for the establishment of Chorleywood College were made by a number of men situated in governmental offices and in the NIB. The evolution of Chorleywood conforms to the pattern identified by Phillips, in his history of the *Blind in British Society*, where the intervention of the State was 'neither sudden nor dramatic', and 'competence and resilience' was demonstrated by charity in providing for the blind.⁷ The need for a secondary school for girls similar to Worcester College was acknowledged by the Inspectors of the boys' school in 1915 and this had been reinforced by HMI Eichholz to the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.⁸ Even then,

Government was either unwilling or unable, given the impact of war on the nation's finances, to take the lead; the initiative of a leading charity was required to enable the creation and survival of a secondary school for girls. In 1917, the opportunity was provided by individual philanthropy. J.H. Batty donated the 'Cedars' house and estate to the NIB, and it was the acquisition of such suitable premises which 'clinched' the charity's decision to continue the broadening of its role (discussed in Chapter Two) and found a new school in Hertfordshire.⁹

Given these circumstances, the first headmistress and her staff saw themselves as beginning an adventure in a school that was the 'first of its kind at home and abroad'.¹⁰ The words of the school song, written by Gwen Upcott, one of the first teachers, made the difficulties of the educational environment very obvious. The students were entreated:

Once aboard the Cedars,
You're never going back,
The wind is blowing forward,
An awkward wind to tack,
You've swung your cot
With a pioneer lot,
You'll very soon get
The knack! The knack!¹¹

Such challenges were ahead even though the social environment when Chorleywood College opened in 1921 might have appeared propitious for a pioneering venture in special education for girls. After the struggles of the Victorian and Edwardian period, girls'

secondary schools and university colleges for women had established their position, and, by 1920, women had gained full membership of Oxford University.¹² Women had won the fight for the vote, and Parliament appeared to be taking a new interest in issues concerning women.¹³ In 1919, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act had enacted that:

A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office or post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation...¹⁴

This allowed women to enter a range of professions including the Civil Service and the Law.

However, the task facing the founders of Chorleywood College was far from straightforward as girls and women were still a long way from achieving full equality. There had, in fact, been an anti-feminist reaction to the developments and increased opportunities resulting from the Great War, with a belief that once the 'emergency' was over 'the family and its welfare should become the main concern of women'.¹⁵ Bennion has demonstrated the impact of the detailed provisions of the Act in limiting the degree of emancipation, while Pugh has highlighted how the marriage bar introduced for professions such as teaching restricted employment opportunities for many women.¹⁶ Paula Bartley considers that women were still handicapped by male expectations:

In the eyes of many men, women's only legitimate reason for existence was to serve them, so little had changed in this respect.¹⁷

In education, Felicity Hunt has seen the economic and political inequalities of society influencing policy in the Board of Education. Senior civil servants were all men, with female inspectors regarded as 'separate and inferior beings' and the opinions of women teachers generally not being respected.¹⁸ As a consequence of 'the powerful tendency ... for girls' lives to be seen in terms of role, rather than career', secondary school pupils were expected to be taught 'the norm *plus*', with extra time required for the aesthetic and practical subjects.¹⁹

These pressures placed additional demands and expectations on any girls' school but this was particularly the case for one which required official endorsement to make it financially viable; again as at Worcester, the boundaries between public and private education could not be rigid. Chorleywood needed to emulate Worcester College and gain Board of Education recognition as 'efficient' on the list of schools of a special type. Such approval gave the prospect of grant expenditure by local education authorities, but in order to get this assistance towards financial stability and success for its students, the founders of Chorleywood had to resolve the dilemmas involved in maintaining a social position for their blind students, whilst tackling some of the prejudices against spending on secondary education for girls. As Delamont has stated in her structuralist examination of the elite education of girls, 'Changing the model of society is a perilous enterprise'.²⁰ At a time when the point of funding blind boys' education was being questioned by some Education Authorities, the task of gaining the essential financial support for a girls' school was always going to be difficult.²¹

The timing of the College's founding was not propitious to gaining potential government funding. Despite encouragement from the Board of Education, who in a 'semi-official letter' had given 'good reason to think' that the new school could get the same level of grant as that given to Worcester College, this was not to be the case.²² With the country seeking to tackle a National Debt at fourteen times the pre-war level, the Treasury were seeking a reduction in public expenditure and proposed educational reform was presenting a particular target.²³ They turned down the first Chorleywood request on the grounds that the 1920 Blind Persons' Act had placed the duty of deciding whether to fund students on the LEAs, but they also made reference to the 'somewhat experimental nature' of the education to be provided.²⁴

Despite the precedents provided for middle class girls by grammar schools, Chorleywood College had to prove itself before the secondary education of blind girls would gain the same recognition and monetary backing from the Government as was available for the boys of Worcester. The early years saw constant financial insecurity, forcing Sir Beachcroft Towse and Phyllis Monk to make pleas for endowments and financial help.²⁵ A significant step towards economic security came when the school was placed on the list of those considered 'efficient' in 1926. By 1929, LEAs had sent fourteen of the thirty-two pupils at Chorleywood, a figure comparable to the eighteen out of forty-two boys that authorities were supporting at Worcester College.²⁶ This still did not completely solve the girls' school's difficulties because the full amount was being paid in only three of these cases. LEAs viewed the purpose of education in terms of potential economic benefit, and Miss Monk perceived an unwillingness to spend money on the secondary education of a female pupil when her future career prospects were considered highly uncertain.²⁷

However, although gender made the position more difficult, in the 1920s the social climate had changed sufficiently to allow some disquiet at the inequality of Chorleywood's situation in comparison to that of Worcester College. Dr. Eichholz, the Chief Medical Inspector, visited the school for the 1925 inspection, and this enabled him to make a recommendation in 1929 after Eagar of the NIB had made an unofficial approach on the subject of official recognition for grant purposes.²⁸ The Board of Education accepted Eichholz's assessment that the position of the school was 'anomalous and indefensible', and claimed that the efficiency of Chorleywood was being hindered by lack of a grant. This time the Treasury did provide funding, demonstrating that the right of blind girls to a secondary education had been officially recognised. After 1932, LEAs got some assistance with the fees through the giving of £25 per pupil in grant. Monk claims that this had a great impact on the school, ensuring that:

the miner's and the millionaire's daughter and the child with no home and means could and did share the College on equal terms, long before the Education Act of 1944 made this mixing generally possible.²⁹

By 1938, twenty-six pupils were paid for by their LEA, with four partly provided for by parents and most of the remainder paid for by the NIB or other charitable organisations.³⁰ However, this did not really alter much about the priorities of the school before the Second World War. Just as has been seen at Worcester, students from poorer backgrounds were by far the exception. Monk describes a doctor's daughter as typical of the type of student who was sent to the school in its early years; 'from a cultured home with other members of the family at carefully selected schools.'³¹ Many LEAs appear to have been unaware of the

school or they were reluctant to incur the additional expense of sending a student into secondary education. Even for those who were at a grammar school while their sight was worsening, a transfer to the College was perceived to have been largely a matter of chance.³² A placement was dependent on parents or teachers being aware of the College's existence, while also considering that a secondary education would be beneficial to the student; these were factors which would put the children of the middle classes at a definite advantage in the deferential society of the inter-war years.

The limited amount of mixing of social classes which did occur was not a subject of rejoicing for the Inspectorate, dominated by the elitist class thinking that Simon has presented as dominating the Board of Education in the inter-war period.³³ Concern was expressed about how the miner's child would readjust 'her life to the social conditions of a poor home after the more enjoyable surroundings of a secondary school'. The Inspectors' feeling that she could experience a 'sharp disappointment in readjustment' fits in with a concern for the preservation of the social order evident in the early 1930s.³⁴ This was a time when the Great Depression was still causing unemployment to rise, and the Conservative leader, Stanley Baldwin, could tell his colleagues that, 'the main ambition of my life is to prevent the class war becoming a reality.'³⁵ In 1938 when the problems of unemployment had receded, the high fees, and the difficulties of gaining employment which further education would make 'congenial to them', led inspectors to conclude that there were only a 'limited number' of the blind from the working classes for whom secondary education was 'really essential'.³⁶ In 1933, the Board went as far as to tell the NIB that they did not 'consider there were any girls now in other blind schools suitable for Chorleywood'.³⁷

Writing in the post-1945 era when secondary education was available for all, Monk promoted the social mixing for its own sake, and regretted the fact that for many families there was a need to gain the wages which could be gained in industrial workshops; however, in the 1930s her response demonstrated no real concern for changing the social order.³⁸ With a failure to appreciate the extent of the problems which had hit the old industrial areas such as the mining valleys, she claimed that poorer students would have other compensations, as 'culture will at any rate produce a happier life'.³⁹

An insight into some of the differences of attitude towards gender present within the Board of Education was also evident in the experience of the short-lived experiment of including boys in the Kindergarten section (Illustration 5-A). When it opened the College contained students from the age of nine, although they soon gained a four-year-old who stayed for her school career until she took Higher Certificate. Pupils in this department were taught according to the model adopted by schools for the sighted, with plenty of practical work included, as well as English and arithmetic.⁴⁰ In the late 1930s, boys were admitted and the name changed to Preparatory Department, in line with the assumption of boys' public schools that such male pupils were destined for a secondary education. Although initially dismissed at the Board of Education as 'propaganda as regards the activities of the NIB', the preparatory 'experiment' was seen to 'justify itself' by 1938 when four boys were resident and one attended as a half-day pupil.⁴¹ Additional levels of concern were demonstrated by HMI when they had to review provision for boys of this age from that shown when only younger girls were being educated at the school. Detailed information started to be included in reports on the nature of the curriculum for younger pupils. The needs, and nature, of younger boys were seen as different. Although younger girls had

been living upstairs in the building for years, inspectors now felt the more boisterous nature of boys required that bars should be put across their dormitory window.

Just as was shown in Chapter Three to have been the case with the increased State funding of pupils at Worcester College, the boundaries between private and public provision were starting to be eroded. However, although the right of middle class blind girls to a secondary education had been recognised, ensuring the future prospects of boys was still considered to be of more significance.

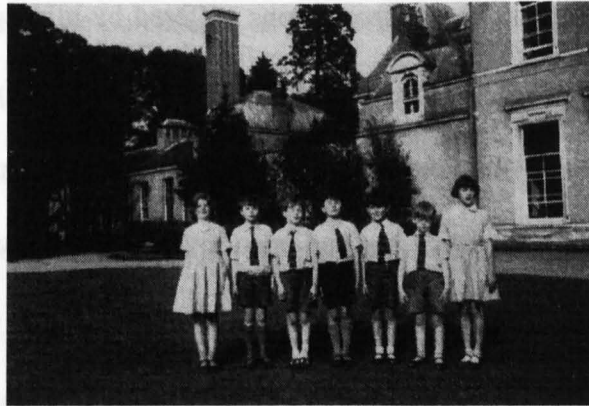


Illustration 5-A: Some of the boys of Chorleywood College for Girls.⁴²

5.2 The Male Role in the formation of the new School

The nature of the secondary education which developed at Chorleywood College in the inter-war years was to a great extent the result of the perceptions and priorities of four blind men on the Executive Council of the NIB who passed the resolution which had led to its founding. Again these men of influence were Sir Arthur Pearson, Sir Beachcroft Towse, Sir Washington Ranger and Godfrey Mowatt.⁴³ They had all been born in the mid-Victorian period and their view of the role of women, as well as the status and methods of

the existing schools for the blind, can be seen to have influenced the decisions taken on the direction of the new school.

Pearson does seem to have applied his aim of helping 'blind people to escape from that passive half-life which seemed so commonly accepted as inevitable' to women as well as men.⁴⁴ He wanted to show blindness 'not merely as a calamity, but as an opportunity', and, by 1914, he had been made aware of the difficulties which confronted educated blind girls.⁴⁵ Prompted by a campaign initiated by the new President of the NIB to increase the production of Braille books, a young blind woman, Mabel Green, had written a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* expressing both the frustrations suffered by blind girls through a lack of facilities for higher education and the difficulty experienced then in obtaining employment in the professions for which they were trained.⁴⁶ She became the first person Pearson met who had been born blind and he felt she had been given a 'pretty raw deal in life'. Mabel had gone to work in the NIB, and, Pearson was to show at the end of the war that he had not forgotten her.⁴⁷

The case of Mabel Green must have highlighted for Sir Arthur the issues faced by blind girls from the middle classes, and the school he helped to create would work towards remedying some of these problems. In order to appoint a headmistress, Pearson did not seek an experienced member of the CTB, presumably because they would have been accustomed to educating girls to an elementary level, and, the assumption being, to the standards of the working class. To meet middle class aspirations, Pearson appears to have wanted someone who would create a new style of school for blind girls. A staff member at St. Dunstan's, Miss Gordon, recommended that he should approach Phyllis Monk, a fellow-pupil during her education at Blackheath School.⁴⁸

Miss Monk had the right background if Pearson was looking for a woman with an understanding of the education of girls from the upper and professional classes. She had obviously made a decision to follow as varied a career as possible during her first twelve years in teaching; she included a High School and County Secondary School, as well as Roedean, a girls' 'Public School', and a training college on her curriculum vitae. Chorleywood College under Phyllis Monk demonstrates the same goal that Penny Summerfield has identified in her studies of the mainstream girls' secondary schools; the school was trying to establish the status of its students by making them members of the middle class. In order to be considered as delivering a secondary education on a par with that received by the girls' fully sighted peers, the school evolved to show an equal concern with the 'pursuit of academic success, the preparation of girls for a few carefully chosen post-school destinations, and the lessons in femininity which they taught them'.⁴⁹

Acquiring a status among the schools for the elite of society was far more important to the Executive Council than any concerns about establishing a position among existing schools for the blind. The fact that Phyllis Monk had no experience of working with the blind or partially sighted (or any other 'disabled' pupils) was undoubtedly regarded by Pearson as an advantage rather than as a disadvantage.⁵⁰ In her book, *Though Land Be Out of Sight* (the title of which came from the school song), Monk felt able to admit her initial 'ignorance' of the education of the blind, and reported that she reacted with 'incredulity and wonder' on her visits to elementary schools such as that run by the Birmingham Royal Institute.⁵¹ Whilst such observations might have shown her some of the potential for independence demonstrated by blind children, the new headmistress had her ideas on the

‘possibilities’ available for her new students confirmed after being invited by Brown to Worcester College.⁵²

The successful establishment of the school had been under the patronage of influential members of the executive council of the NIB. Their influence, and the selection they therefore made of Miss Monk as headmistress, demonstrated how blind men perceived the need to plan the new school to step outside the traditional model of special schools aimed at the working classes in their search for appropriate opportunities for middle class blind girls.

5.3 Working with patriarchal influence

Male influence had helped to establish the school, but the appointment of Miss Monk did not mean an end to the direct and indirect influence of gender perceptions. There was a male supervising role, which was to identify itself in a preoccupation with many of the cultural perceptions of women in the inter-war period. In this Chorleywood was again reflecting broader developments in mainstream girls’ education. Sheila Fletcher has pointed out that men dominated and chaired the Council of the Girls’ Public Day School Company from its beginnings until the 1960s.⁵³ The sociologist, Dale Spender, in her study of *Invisible Women* in education, has noted that men have been ‘decidedly in control of the institutions and the subjects’, even to the extent of determining what women were allowed to learn.⁵⁴ Where Chorleywood College was more unusual was in the tensions evident as a result of the school’s position within a larger charity, which had diverse concerns and which was not run by educationalists. Miss Monk was dependent on the backing of such men at the NIB.

At first, the NIB Council, and a standing committee, dealt with Chorleywood business as part of a long agenda. Phyllis Monk was present at that part of the meeting, but she was concerned that the interests of the College would get submerged as its governing charity expanded, and was relieved when a Board of Governors was set up in the late 1920s. From the start women just out-numbered the men on the Governors, but, although at least three of these were headmistresses (Wycombe Abbey, St. Albans and Harrow Secondary School), they probably lacked influence compared with the men present. Towse was Chairman and is credited by Monk, who dedicated her book to his memory, as always 'behind us, with us, and before us'.⁵⁵ Joining Towse on the Board were T. H. Tylor, a former Worcester College student and an Oxford don, and the influential Dr. Eichholz of the Board of Education. W. McG. Eagar, Secretary-General of the NIB from 1928, was in attendance, although there seems to have been some opposition to his being made a full governor with voting rights.⁵⁶

With regard to the management of the school, Miss Monk did challenge the level of interference she experienced. The Governors' minutes provide an indication of conflict between the NIB and the school over appointments and respective functions. The consequence was a standing committee, made up of Eagar, Towse and Miss Crosthwaite of Wycombe Abbey School, which asserted that any increase in expenditure over salaries had to be agreed with the NIB at Great Portland Street.⁵⁷ Problems over the rules remained and they endeavoured to find 'a formula which will reconcile the status of the school as a secondary school and of the Head Mistress with the responsibilities of the Governors and of the Council of the Institute'. The Committee decided to look outside for advice and did discuss an approach to the President of the Association of Headmistresses, demonstrating that the status of women in teaching was increasing.⁵⁸

However, Miss Monk could not afford to ignore the authority of the men of the NIB. As a female head teacher under the control of a male-dominated charity, Monk lacked much of the freedom of Brown at Worcester College. This influence could explain the fact that the Headmistress of this pioneering school pursued a surprisingly moderate path for a woman with her educational background. Monk had entered teaching at a time when the women's suffrage movement was at its height (Illustration 5-B). As an educated woman of this era, she was unlikely to have been unmoved by the arguments on the inequalities of the position of women. She worked at Roedean School from 1912 under Miss Millicent Lawrence and her sisters. Miss Lawrence was a keen proponent of women's suffrage and encouraged staff and students to become involved, to the extent that the local press claimed that in 1910 a 'large contingent' of staff from Roedean were involved in the non-militant Woman's Suffrage Society in Brighton.⁵⁹ However, this may have made her aware of the criticism which the 'shrieking sisterhood' of militant Suffragettes had provoked, so that, like educational pioneers such as Emily Davies, the founder of Girton College, she made an effort to distance herself from strident demands.⁶⁰ Chorleywood College magazines present no evidence of an interest in the position of women at a time when Cheltenham Ladies College was considering 'Women and the Housing Problem' and "'The New Age of Learning' Where College Girls are needed".⁶¹ Cheltenham College was inviting speakers to demonstrate the new opportunities open to women, whereas Miss Monk was later to admit her school had not sought to open up new careers.⁶²

Any feeling of independence within Miss Monk must have been undermined by the regular visits of the Secretary General of the NIB. An Oxford graduate and former public schoolmaster, Eagar does not appear to have been used to working to promote the interests

of women. As discussed in Chapter Three, he had been appointed for his skills as an administrator on social issues, but from his university days and through into his retirement, he had maintained an active involvement in the Boys' Clubs.⁶³ He had been a member of the Provisional Committee which set up the National Association of Boys' Clubs, and considered the movement had 'proved the democratic argument for equal opportunity for all children'.⁶⁴ However, he had been one of the Committee men responsible for turning down an offer from the National Organisation of Girls' Clubs to join forces.⁶⁵ He was opposed to any mixing of boys and girls, and this was a result of his view of the differing priorities for the development of the two sexes.

An examination of Eagar's contribution to the Boys' clubs reveals the attitudes which could have influenced Secretary General's views of education for blind girls. Dawes, the historian of the boys' movement, has been critical of the way Eagar seems to have been 'dazzled by the muscular, bronzed battalions of the Hitler Jugend'.⁶⁶ Eagar used his position as editor of *The Boy*, the National Association's magazine, to praise the manner in which 'attainable ideals' had been given to young German and Italian men.⁶⁷ The clubs had always emphasised the importance of improving physical health, but Eagar had expressed his admiration for the priorities stressed in Fascist and Nazi literature and the lessons which could be drawn:

Youth is idealised, exhorted to patriotism, trained for fitness and finally prepared for self-sacrifice and self-surrender... we who are concerned with boys... are working for the future of our race.⁶⁸

This admiration of Nazism and Fascism, expressed in June 1934, was not untypical of many in the British ruling elite, with peers and Members of Parliament attending Mosley's British Union of Fascists Olympia meeting on the seventh of the same month.⁶⁹ A 1933 *Daily Mail* interview of Magda Goebbels (the wife of the Nazi Minister of Propaganda) had been very sympathetic in allowing her to deny that all women had been returned to 'domestic subservience', whilst also down-playing the significance of their exclusion from Government and the Law. Frau Goebbels had stated:

We are on the threshold, I believe, of an era of strong men. In such times women must not struggle for the place of men, but must fulfil their own important destiny. ... The German woman of the future is to be chic, well-groomed, beautiful, and intelligent.⁷⁰

However, a *Times* article later in 1933 had highlighted the manner in which Hitler's arguments were based upon a 'perverse use ... of his knowledge' and throwing 'history overboard'.⁷¹ For Eagar, a member of the elite, to be professing admiration for the 'ideal of fitness for a virile, and possibly aggressive patriotism' indicates, if nothing else, a narrow patriarchal view which would at least have allied him with the emergence of a 'cult of domesticity' which had taken firm root with the impact of the high levels of male unemployment during the Great Depression in the 1930s.⁷² The women's magazines popular at the time promoted the idea that, although a woman might work before marriage, her concern then would become home and family.⁷³ Pugh has considered that the proprietors appear to have 'followed an agenda designed to ... deter them [women] from taking advantage of the opportunities now available'.⁷⁴

Eagar's concern for health could be seen to fit in with the growing interest in hiking and exercise evident in the inter-war years. However, for women, the direction this was to take was exemplified by the establishment of the Women's League of Health and Beauty in 1930; its goal was to encourage exercises designed to help women cope with the stress of childbearing as well as making women 'so beautiful they are an inspiration rather than a temptation'.⁷⁵ As will be shown in the next chapter, the curriculum of Chorleywood did emphasise fitness and grace, but this still did not meet Eagar's approval. In his dealings with Chorleywood College, Eagar appears to have made his own judgements and used them against Miss Monk in a way he did not do as openly to Brown, despite the problems with the Headmaster's management style described in Chapter Three. In 1943, Eagar wrote to the Board of Education questioning the delivery of Physical Education and Music at the school.⁷⁶ As will be discussed in Chapter Six, he was critical of Monk's plans for the appointment of a full-time music teacher, and was to describe the Headmistress to officials as 'an improviser rather than an organiser in staff matters'; a harsh judgement on a head-teacher who had been forced by the constraints of student numbers to be careful with her staffing.⁷⁷

When writing after her retirement, Phyllis Monk did praise Eagar's concern for the development of physical training work and belief that the school should be well-equipped, but, in a book published by the NIB, the headmistress would have lacked the freedom to be completely honest in her assessment.⁷⁸ The concerns Eagar expressed over the teaching of Physical Education related to his dissatisfaction with the poor posture exhibited by some students. Teachers do seem to have been aware that their priorities should be broader than just the academic standards of the school. In 1940, long before Eagar wrote to the Board, Miss Monk and the Physical Training teacher, Miss McConnell, had introduced groupings

to 'help posture generally and sitting positions in particular'.⁷⁹ There was an award for those whose assessments kept them in the top group, and a former student recalled that remedial work had become more appealing to those who wished to avoid being 'stigmatised' through their listing in the bottom group.⁸⁰ If Eagar was still concerned, he must have expected high levels of deportment.

The creation of such a system of awards can be seen as a clear example of the impact of male influence on Miss Monk as it ran counter to her educational philosophy, the ideas of which will be discussed in the next section. The history of Chorleywood under Phyllis Monk demonstrates the dominant role of perceptions of gender conceived by men who had grown up in the pre-1914 era. Even after the school had been established, continued success was dependent on continuing to conform to their expectations as other world events impinged on attitudes.

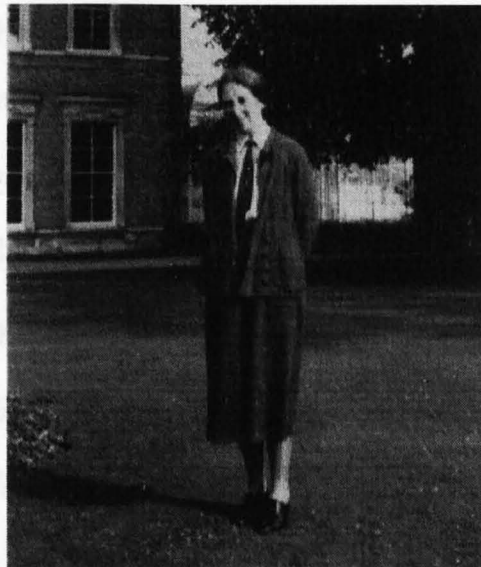


Illustration 5-B: A professional woman - Miss Monk, a female graduate of the first decade of the twentieth century, a time of 'collars and college ties'.⁸¹

5.4 Establishing a Girls' Public School

Although the men of the NIB did maintain a role in the direction of the school, the years up to the 1944 Act can be presented as the era of Phyllis Monk. The importance of the individual agency of school leaders such as Dorothy de Zouche and Emmeline Tanner in the inter-war years has been recognised by Price and Glenday in their study of the Association of Headmistresses.⁸² Miss Monk was Chorleywood College's first headmistress, and was in the position for over twenty years, and therefore was largely responsible for the nature of the establishment which developed. She adopted the goal of a liberal education, the model for a secondary school with which she was most familiar but also the one which could ensure a status outside the traditional perception of special education and appeal to middle class parents.

When Brown at Worcester College sought to deliver a liberal education, he was adhering to Dr. Johnson's definition of preparation for 'becoming a gentleman', but Monk was following the model put forward by Maria Grey, the founder of the Girls' Public Day School Company; Grey had seen these principles as providing for the 'moral and intellectual training' essential for girls as well as boys.⁸³ Such a vision, as well as the ambition this represented, was made clear in the first prospectus of the new College:

The education will be as liberal as in the best girls' public schools, and the physical and mental development thus afforded will enable blind girls to live full and active lives at school, at home and in the professions.⁸⁴

The pioneers of education for girls in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been described as 'liberal feminists'; according to Gaby Weiner, they were '*liberal, bourgeois and highly individualistic*, principally concerned with extending legal, political and employment rights of middle-class women'.⁸⁵ The Headmistress, and the other women involved in the formation and evolution of Chorleywood, had been educated and had spent their early teaching careers in environments influenced by such beliefs, and they brought the same values to their work with blind girls.⁸⁶ Monk had attended Blackheath School, but it was her six years teaching at Roedean School which had given her experience of a boarding environment and thus provided the model of the 'best girls' public schools' to follow. She was later to state that she had reached the stage in her career when she was looking to put her educational ideas into practice by taking responsibility for a pupil's whole day. When she had done a 'little exploring of the special work already being done among blind children', Monk concluded that Chorleywood College would provide this opportunity, but she intended to implement a philosophy which would take her outside the existing model for a special school.⁸⁷

For Chorleywood, control of the full day was always going to be necessary in order to have enough female blind students to form a fee-paying secondary school, but, in an era where boarding was seen as beneficial in promoting independence and maturity, Phyllis Monk also argued that it was vital to provide additional time for carrying out chores, and exploring objects of interest with pupils with levels of sight loss.⁸⁸ This would work towards the realisation of the Headmistress's philosophy of enabling the individual to 'judge her own actions and to entertain a large expectancy with regard to her own possibilities'.⁸⁹

The stress on Miss Monk's links with Roedean evident in articles of the 1920s was significant in creating an image which would demonstrate how different this school was to existing provision for blind girls.⁹⁰ Roedean was one of the first of the 'girls' public schools and it has been famously described as the 'potting shed of the English rose'.⁹¹ By 1912, its Principals, the Lawrence sisters, had decided to take only boarders, considering that their school could encourage the development of:

The responsibilities of corporate life, essential to their education as citizens.... It would promote effectively, too, those first and fundamental aims of theirs – physical welfare, the development of character through self-reliance and the maximum of liberty possible to be given, and good intellectual training.⁹²

Roedean's pioneering adoption of team sports was seen as furthering these goals in an imitation of the boys' public school model perceived as so important by Brown at Worcester.⁹³ Miss Monk created her own team games when she realised that the Roedean games of lacrosse, cricket and tennis would not be appropriate for blind girls in their unmodified form; she adapted existing sports to create Quickit, a version of cricket, and netball-tennis, as well as a totally new game, Sport-X.⁹⁴ The Lawrence sisters demanded, as Margaret Cole recalled with disapproval, a high level of enthusiasm from games' players, and this was imitated by Monk, who proudly repeated a comment made of her attitude:

It was necessary to play as though one played for Roedean; woe to her who attempted to potter.⁹⁵

Roedean's academic standards in the early twentieth century were criticised by Margaret Cole, but the school was aimed at a clientele of 'rich bourgeois' parents who did not necessarily want their daughters prepared for university and a life outside the home.⁹⁶ Hunt has described the manner in which secondary education had become a 'middle-class status symbol' and, for such parents, the academic side of education was not necessarily seen as the most significant factor in choosing a school.⁹⁷ When Towse, as Chairman of Governors, sent out a letter to the 'press of the Empire' in a further effort to increase the numbers at Chorleywood College in 1937, he stressed the way that the school would assist the blind girl by enabling her to 'realise...the longing to be a "public school girl"'.⁹⁸ Towse was the product of an era which tended to see any schooling of girls as a means of improving 'national efficiency' through the training of future wives and mothers.⁹⁹ Girls' secondary schools were providing the awareness of the importance of health and duty which the eugenisists had presented as essential to the continued strength of the nation.¹⁰⁰ The image of girls' schools in imparting cultured behaviour was confirmed by the stories of writers such as Angela Brazil which had become popular by this time.¹⁰¹

With parents and Governors having such priorities, Miss Monk was able to proclaim her initial feelings that the education should be broad and that public examinations should not 'cramp our style'.¹⁰² She boasted in the 1920s that there was no system of 'marks (except remarks!)', considering that by encouraging effort the result was 'sound work done for its own sake'.¹⁰³ When she realised that outside pressures dictated that external qualifications should be included (see Chapter Six), she resolved that they were appropriate 'if taken at the right time, by the right people, and in the right subjects.... in short, without pressure.'¹⁰⁴ This was a flexibility and luxury which was only possible in a school where

there were no great academic expectations of its girls. This was also in line with the attitudes within the Association of Headmistresses where there had been opposition to the restrictive regulations of the examination system and expressions of the necessity of leaving time for the develop of special gifts and for individual study.¹⁰⁵

Miss Monk relished a role which put her at the centre of the school, following the practice of the Lawrences at Roedean of leaving her office door open most of the time to allow pupils to talk to her and even encouraging an annual school programme of entertainments as celebration of her birthday.¹⁰⁶ She claimed to have created a family atmosphere with her father becoming the 'father' of the school, giving talks and becoming a 'personal friend' of many students.¹⁰⁷

However, the philosophy adopted by Miss Monk was not completely that of the Roedean School of the Lawrence era. She did not adopt a similar system of prefects 'to take any general charge of other youngsters' morals, for that seemed likely to detract from the undiscussed, "unlabelled" and unselfconscious influence that grows between understanding minds of all ages'.¹⁰⁸ Miss Monk considered that in a small boarding community she could get by with having few rules, a goal close to the original idea of the Lawrence sisters; at Roedean this had become a complicated expansion of regulation which was seen as unfair and irrational.¹⁰⁹ Recalling her time as a pupil at the south coast school, Gwen Upcott criticised a 'life beset with rules and with the corresponding bad marks' which perhaps helped to confirm Monk's strategy of 'no set plans for wrong-doers, [and] hoping for an inspiration of the moment to fit the case'.¹¹⁰ Miss Monk believed that 'standards were felt rather than stated'. The adoption of posture 'awards' went against her philosophy as she did not believe in a system of 'visible signposts or awards'; although she was to recognise

in the later success of the Girls Guides, which student pressure forced her to allow, that some students did welcome such structures.¹¹¹ At Chorleywood, as will be shown in the next chapter, the headmistress followed the model more generally adopted within other girls' secondary schools of ensuring that 'children of all ages became accustomed to genuine self-government'.¹¹²

Equally the approach of Phyllis Monk does not fit in with that at a 'progressive' school such as Badminton.¹¹³ Just as was the case with Miss Baker, the Badminton headmistress, Miss Monk did have an attachment to the 'attitude of the [Society of] Friends' and used non-denominational prayers; Chorleywood girls were allowed to worship wherever they chose and, the headmistress claimed, developed a 'tolerance' and 'an understanding value of sincerity in worship wherever found'.¹¹⁴ Miss Monk did encourage a measure of internationalism with League of Nations and Esperanto groups, as well as occasional lectures in the early 1930s on the 'History of Unemployment' and the League of Nations, but this fits in with the humanism which was evident within interwar women's organizations, and which has been shown by Jacobs and Goodman to have influenced discussions in the Association of Headmistresses on the role of music in creating a bond between races.¹¹⁵ Unlike at Badminton, the pioneering leader of a new school for blind girls did not seek to encourage international citizenship through political activism and the imparting of socialist principles.¹¹⁶ Instead, as will be explored in the next chapter, Miss Monk claimed to have encouraged a broader social awareness:

Through the stories of pioneers for social welfare and truth, the stress was on action in life, and the growth of a sense of true values to direct it.¹¹⁷

Miss Monk was not in a position where she could have adopted a 'progressive' philosophy of education which 'aimed to subvert the value-system of the public school tradition in order to mould new kinds of citizens and leaders'.¹¹⁸ The educational philosophy adopted at Chorleywood not only fitted in with the headmistress's experiences, but also reflected the priorities of what was required if the new school was to gain acceptance and be seen as preparing its girls for membership of the middle classes. Chorleywood College's survival was dependent on demonstrating its distinctiveness from the existing schools for the blind and from the negative perceptions of disability which had surrounded special education. These concerns were evident in the presentation of the school. The Chorleywood College prospectuses promoted the facilities and location of the school. Photographs, such as Illustration 5-C and Illustration 5-D, emphasised the nature of the surroundings, highlighting the grandeur of the Cedars building (a Renaissance-style chateau) and estate from the air, as well as showing students around the lily pond and in the swimming pool. The emphasis on 'prestigious facilities' in special schools has subsequently been portrayed by Fish as part of a negative preoccupation resulting from the institutionalisation of charity.¹¹⁹ Charitable foundations have been accused of expecting a 'seemly sense of gratitude and dependence' for this provision, with the result that the 'disabled' were deprived of their individuality and normal patterns of living, but, with Chorleywood, the emphasis on environment can be shown to be more in line with girls' public schools and thereby an indicator of a drive for elite status.¹²⁰

Delamont in a study of girls' school histories has identified a tendency to promote an image of the "rural setting with its healthy, happy inmates".¹²¹ Roedean School emphasised its coastal location and Delamont's chapter was entitled 'Beech-covered

hillside', in recognition of the image presented in the song of Wycombe Abbey School. Buildings were also important. With the 1919 purchase of the Imperial hotel, the 'town's grandest building', Malvern Girls' College is presented as having 'proclaimed that it had indeed become one of the most important [schools] in England'.¹²²



Illustration 5-C: Aerial photograph of Chorleywood, showing the rear of the building and the Sport-X field, included in the school prospectus c.1936.

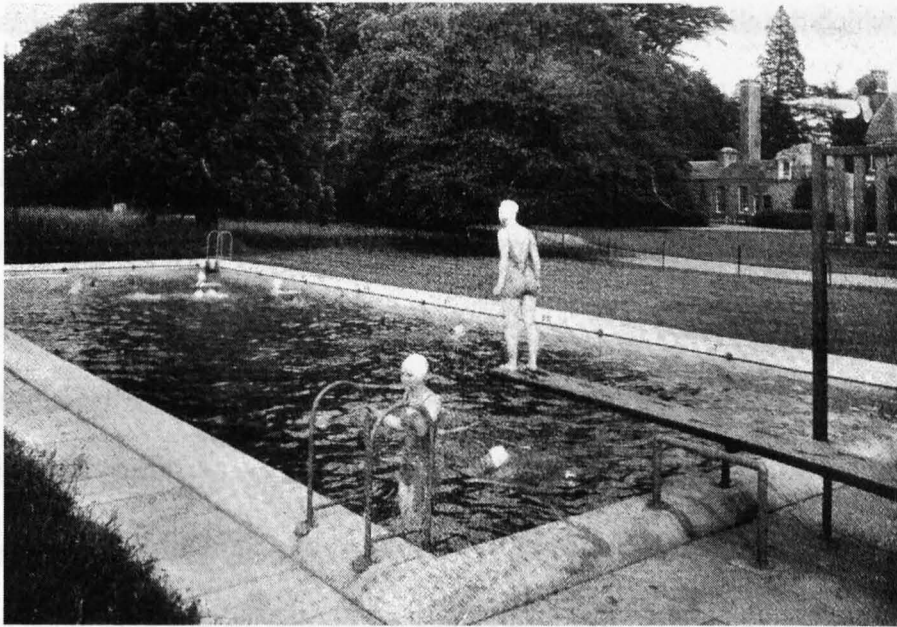


Illustration 5-D: The external environment and swimming pool from the school prospectus c.1936.

A school which was trying to appeal to the middle classes needed to pay attention to the internal and external environment. The importance of the whole setting was demonstrated in the articles written by journalists when the early funding problems made a general invitation to the press essential; articles commented on the manner in which there was ‘nothing of institute or asylum about “The Cedars”’, and called it ‘a first-class girls’ school’ with an ‘impression of space or serenity’.¹²³ When Pearson advertised the College’s opening to the *Times*, he boasted that ‘no pains have been spared to equip it in a manner which will bear comparison with the best secondary schools for sighted students’.¹²⁴ As will become apparent when the specialist equipment problems are considered in the next chapter, this must be a reference to the great interest Miss Monk had taken in establishing a ‘culture’, through purchasing what she described as ‘good’ furniture, china, linen and cutlery.¹²⁵ The pioneering headmistresses of girls’ schools had believed that instead of being depressing, a school should be made ‘attractive by the beauty of pictures, flowers, seemliness and grace of domestic detail’, but this was also linked to the

manner in which the elite of society in the early century judged according to possessions.¹²⁶ In his history of the middle class, James has described the importance of good china in announcing 'spending power and discrimination', with the aim of achieving the 'cultivation of a taste that would excite respect and admiration'.¹²⁷

A letter written by Pearson advertising the new school had described Miss Monk as a 'lady of high scholastic attainments', reinforcing the importance of fitting the staff into the 'public school' image being created.¹²⁸ Monk was conscious of this, propounding the advantage of employing staff, 'whose approach to the life as a whole supplements good professional qualifications'.¹²⁹ In line with the approach evident at Worcester College, these personal qualities were seen as more important than a knowledge of Braille and the other strategies which were being developed for teaching subjects such as Mathematics to the blind and partially sighted.¹³⁰ Monk's first appointment was to be a personal friend, who had spent two years as a student at Roedean, Gwen Upcott; a selection made with Mowatt's encouragement.¹³¹

Payne, in her thesis, has been less sympathetic to the headmistress's priorities, and considers that the 'only obvious advantage was the maintenance of elitism and class barriers'. She has been highly critical of the staff's lack of a background in the education of the blind, stating that, whereas at Worcester College this can be justified by the teachers' academic excellence, this was not the case at Chorleywood as some staff did admit that they were barely ahead of the students in some subjects.¹³² Certainly, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the size of the school and some preconceptions did lead to what can be seen as limitations in the teaching of some subjects in the curriculum. However, Miss Monk claimed they were 'as highly qualified ... as [in] any good public school'.¹³³

Although this was a promotional statement for a magazine article, the staff was as academically qualified as those of Worcester (particularly given the weaknesses highlighted in Chapter Four). Phyllis Monk had taken the Natural Sciences Tripos at Girton College and her MA in Dublin. Other staff of the inter-war period had attended the universities at Glasgow, Bristol, London, and Oxford, with some of them then gaining a Diploma in Education. Non-graduate staff had gained the relevant qualifications for their specialism through the National Froebel Union or a Physical Education college. Once in post, a knowledge of Braille was seen to be the priority for teaching the blind, and Miss Monk imposed high standards, setting herself, as well as her staff, the goal of reaching the level required by the NIB for the transcription of books.¹³⁴

The staff appointed by Monk were described by inspectors as a 'band of devoted women'.¹³⁵ Their commitment should not be dismissed in an era when terms of employment for teachers at girls' public schools often stated that their 'services should be at the disposal of the headmistress during the whole of the time the school was in session'.¹³⁶ One of the occasions when the admission of non-specialist teaching was made refers to the teaching of Greek by Winifred Deavin, a future Schools' Inspector, and a teacher of Maths and Latin with an Arts degree in Mathematics, Latin, English and French. Given the success of her pupils in studying for Theology degrees at Cambridge colleges, with one of her students going on to gain a First Class Honours degree, it perhaps is not an indication of a lack of teaching ability on the staff.¹³⁷ The other related to Gwen Upcott who successfully prepared a student for an open scholarship to Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford with History as her main subject.¹³⁸

Miss Monk's recruitment policy did go in the face of the increasing status of the CTB, and was again because this group's members were predominantly in the elementary schools for the blind with all their associations with education for the working classes.¹³⁹ Elementary school staff were not considered able to deliver the behaviour and teaching appropriate for a mainstream secondary curriculum. Again the context of the time must be remembered: Upcott has described how she was brought up to be conscious of the differences in behaviour and language of the middle classes and considered that she could not have taken the children of the rich business classes home to meet her father who, as a master at Wellington College, mixed with the upper classes.¹⁴⁰ Just as the early headmistresses felt the need to protect the image of their schools, Monk defended the position of her school by appointing women she considered to be ladies.

The success of Miss Monk in establishing Chorleywood's place among the public schools for girls became evident when the Association of Headmistresses passed a special bye-law to let in a school whose size would otherwise have made it ineligible.¹⁴¹ When establishing her school, Miss Monk was not only aware of the pressures from the men of the NIB, but she was well aware that the College would need to market itself carefully if it was to gain the numbers essential for long-term survival. If she was going to promote her school as a public school for blind girls, she would need to carefully pitch the school in a way that would not challenge the perceptions of the society of the time. The pressures created by views of gender and class were critical and could not be forgotten.

5.5 The pressures of an accentuated 'double conformity'

Creating the new college had presented its own challenges, but Phyllis Monk and her staff recognised that maintaining public school status for blind girls was going to be dependent

on high standards of behaviour. Miss McEwan, the French teacher, considered it 'good for the outside world to know ... [children without sight] are familiar with the code of behaviour commonly accepted among well-behaved school girls.'¹⁴² The girls needed to demonstrate their position on a level with their peers in grammar and public schools, and this was particularly complex for the girls of Chorleywood.

Delamont has described the pressures on the early girls' schools as resulting in a 'double conformity'.¹⁴³ In order to assert their academic prowess, the early schools for girls had to adopt the male curriculum, but they also had to be seen to conform to ideas of lady-like behaviour. Only in this way could the early educators of girls deal with the prejudices which existed against women's education, and the supposed accompanying dangers to women's reputations.¹⁴⁴ Chorleywood College demonstrates an accentuated 'double conformity'. As a result of the particularly powerful male influence upon its founding, the school had to struggle with the need to conform to an ideal of feminine behaviour, whilst also working hard to show that blind girls were the academic equal of their sighted peers.

Monk and her staff felt they needed to insist on standards of ladylike dress and behaviour in ways similar to those Delamont has highlighted as essential for survival at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁵ Histories of girls' grammar schools of that time show a concern for posture, with stories of headmistresses, such as Miss Creak of King Edward VI School for Girls in Birmingham, watching the pupils as they came out of prayers.¹⁴⁶ High standards were expected inside and outside Chorleywood College:

Since appearances mattered in the neighbourhood, hats were normally worn, and also gloves when coats were necessary.¹⁴⁷

The early uniform was very conservative, with homespun tunics with silk dresses of 'seemly length', petticoats and stockings required for dance and physical training. By the late 1920s, this was to be a source of great 'indignity' for girls who were arriving at Chorleywood from schools which had reformed their uniform.¹⁴⁸ The accentuated 'double conformity' meant that Miss Monk felt the need for caution in adapting as society changed. Students of Chorleywood were to joke that, 'What Roedean was like in 1908, Chorleywood is like in 1938', but by 1936, an older and more confident school was able to relent on some of the requirements.¹⁴⁹ A more fitted uniform was introduced with a blazer, and Miss McConnell, the new Physical Training teacher, was allowed, not only to bring in a new shorter and lighter crepe dress for dance, which could now take place in bare feet, but also to introduce less restrictive clothing for gym and outdoor sports.

Activities, and particularly those presented to the outside world, had to portray the girls as typical secondary school students, and this was particularly evident in the photographs included in prospectuses and Monk's official history. Although the boys and girls in the 'prep' department could show exuberance playing in the 'jungle gym' [Illustration 5-E], the older girls had to demonstrate order, discipline and a femininity linked with grace and poise; photographs such as Illustration 5-G, and Illustration 5-H show them seated at their desks in a classroom, doing recreational handwork and playing instruments. Chorleywood's prospectus of 1936 included a picture of group dancing [Illustration 5-F] just as schools for sighted girls such as Innisfree School did in the interwar years.¹⁵⁰ The obviously posed photograph of knitting for the forces [Illustration 5-I] was favoured for the book over the other great contribution to the war effort of rosehip gathering; although this had been the focus of a wartime newspaper article.¹⁵¹

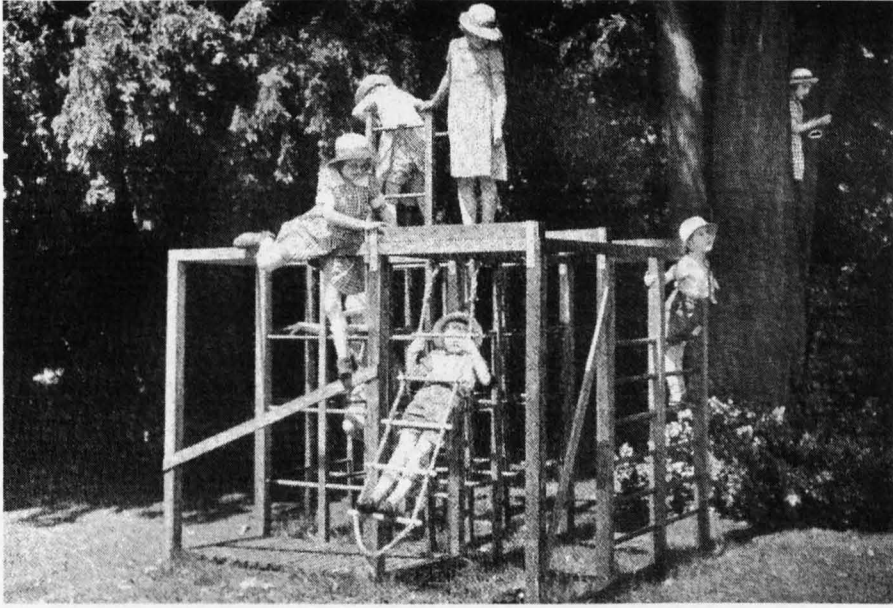


Illustration 5-E: ‘Juniors in the Jungle Gym’, an image appropriate for young girls and boys included in a school prospectus c.1936.

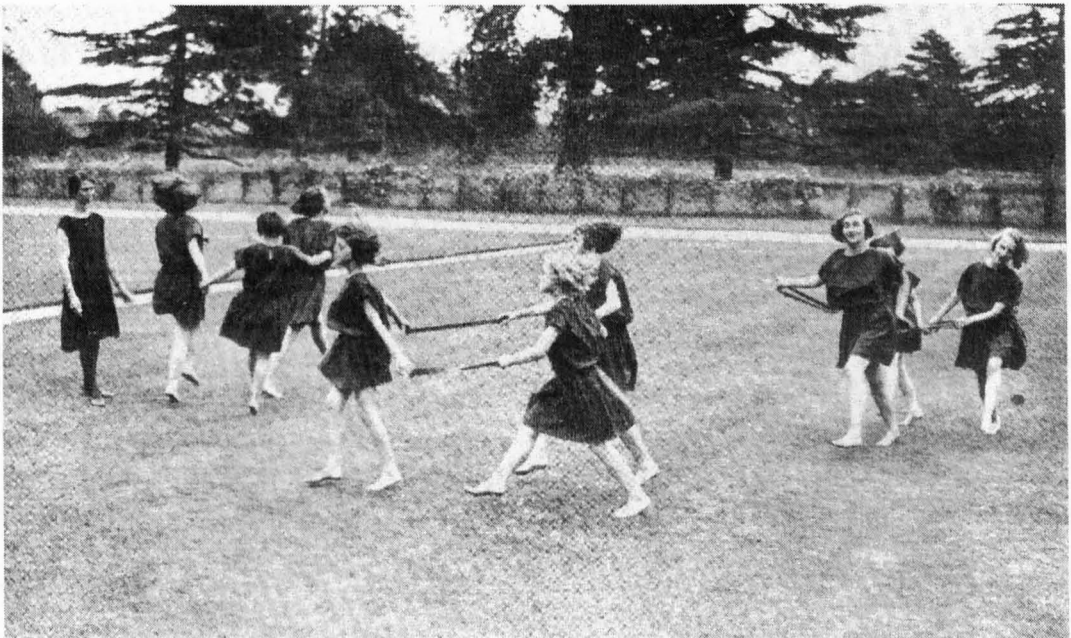


Illustration 5-F: Dancing on the lawn.



Illustration 5-G: Typing: another suitable activity for young ladies from the prospectus c.1936.



Illustration 5-H: Photograph taken by a professional photographer of older girls enjoying their leisure time beside the lily pond in the school grounds.¹⁵²



Illustration 5-I: Free time: Knitting for the Forces (1943). Included in Monk, *Though Land Be Out of Sight*.

In these ways, the school was presenting the cultured, and thereby middle and upper class, nature of its students. As has been demonstrated in chapter two, attitudes to blind people were affected by class prejudice. Many of the assumptions about blind men had been challenged by the wounded soldiers at St. Dunstan's, but blind girls were still seen as predominantly the children of the working class, and, with societal views of women being far from equal, an extra level of conformity was required if Chorleywood students were going to establish their place amongst the middle classes. Although Illustration 5-J of stilt-walking was taken by the same photographers as those included in the book, and shows an active and popular activity, it was not used for publicity purposes. Presumably this was because it presented younger secondary age girls playing in a childish manner and in a way associated with the rough and tumble of streets, rather than participating in the genteel way with which the school wished to be associated.¹⁵³

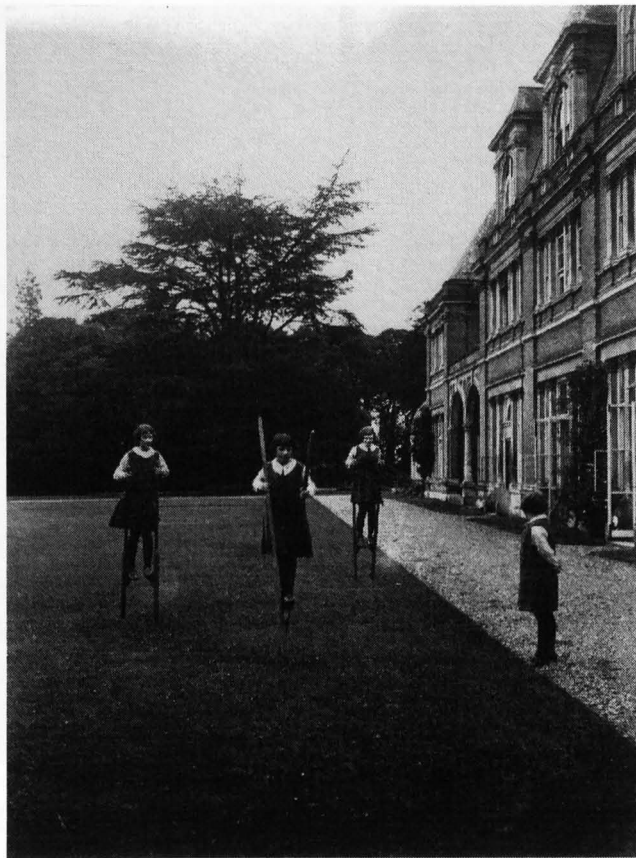


Illustration 5-J: Stilt-walking: a less appropriate image for the girls?¹⁵⁴

If a pupil was unable to maintain this image, the consequences could be severe. One girl was perceived to have been actively discouraged from carrying on to university, after completing her Higher Certificate, because Miss Monk felt her mannerisms were so pronounced that she would provide a poor representation of the other students of the College. The pupil did pursue a career as a shorthand typist in the Civil Service and later passed an Open University degree, suggesting lack of academic background and potential was not the problem.¹⁵⁵ Phyllis Monk saw her students as the sole ambassadors for blind secondary educated young ladies and the future of her school could depend on how they presented which added to the natural caution of her approach.

5.6 Summary

Far from ‘depressing the expectations of their pupils, irrespective of social background’, as Borsay has suggested, Chorleywood was attempting to use the conventions of class and gender to provide its girls with opportunities which challenged society’s division of labour.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the historian has to go beyond the narrow perspectives of existing interpretations of the development of education for blind girls. The pressures imposed by policy-makers and male authority figures must be recognised, as also must the expectations of society in an era when the ‘cult of domesticity’ began to impact as a reaction to the successes of the women’s suffrage movement.

The successful establishment of a secondary school for blind girls was far from a foregone conclusion even in the late 1920s. Although Payne has been critical of Monk’s disappointment at her failure to attract funds when the school was threatened in the early 1920s, in fact the key was not that girls from ‘affluent homes’ were not ‘a priority for philanthropic intervention’, but that society was still doubly disabling females with impairments by failing to recognise their right to all the opportunities of a secondary education.¹⁵⁷ The experience of blind girls cannot be assumed to be the same as that for either girls in the mainstream secondary schools, or for the blind boys of Worcester College. As writers such as Margaret Lloyd have pointed out, ‘disabled women’ have experienced ‘double discrimination’, not helped by the way that even organisations designed to improve their position have been male-oriented.¹⁵⁸

Miss Monk was leading a pioneering school, and if she attacked the matter in the same manner as that used by the early trailblazers in women’s education, this has to be seen as a legacy of her own background, and the only model she felt confident enough that she

would be allowed to follow. Chorleywood's headmistress not only had to deal with the reluctance of educational authorities to spend money on an academic education for blind girls, but she also had to keep the support of the NIB, a charity which, although it made a sizeable financial commitment to the school, still had a limited perception of the purpose of such an education. Within these constraints, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the school was working to enable the girls to enter the adult world with the ability to compete with their sighted peers, and in this way Chorleywood College was slowly beginning to assist in the battle to change attitudes.

5.7 References

¹ See Chapter 1.1.

² Hurt: Borsay, *Disability*, 97.

³ Borsay, *Ibid*, 97.

⁴ Spender, *Invisible Women*, 23

⁵ Payne, 202-5.

⁶ P. Monk, “*Though Land Be Out of Sight*” *The Early Years of Chorleywood College* (London: RNIB, 1952), 14, 15 and 44.

⁷ Phillips, 406.

⁸ Comment HMI Spencer in feedback after a WCB inspection. WCB Gov Mins, 14/7/1915; *Departmental Committee Welfare*, 67.

⁹ Monk, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ G. Upcott and A. Bevan, ‘Our Ship’, SC, NCW.

¹² The North London Collegiate school dated from 1850 and Cheltenham Ladies’ College 1853. Bedford College began in 1849 to allow women to attend classes at London University, and the first Colleges for women began in Oxford and Cambridge in the 1860s and 1870s.

¹³ Pugh has identified 21 such pieces of legislation between 1918 and 1929. M. Pugh, ‘The Impact of Women’s Enfranchisement in Britain’, in C. Daley and M. Nolan (eds.), *Suffrage and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 321.

¹⁴ Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 (c.71).

¹⁵ B. Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 181-2.

¹⁶ F.A.R. Bennion, "The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act – 60 Inglorious Years" [article online]. Available from www.francisbennion.com (5/9/2004): M. Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain 1870-1987*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder, 1999), 180.

¹⁷ P. Bartley, *Votes for Women 1860-1928* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1998), 107.

¹⁸ F. Hunt, *Gender and policy in English Education* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 69.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 118-9.

²⁰ Delamont, *Knowledgeable*, 74.

²¹ Board of Education interview memorandum with Worcester College for the Blind Governors, 1931, ED32/832 NA.

²² Events outlined in Board of Education memorandum 13/2/1929, ED32/932 NA.

²³ Taylor, 170: Simon, *Politics*, 30

²⁴ Education memorandum 13/2/1929.

²⁵ Towse, letter to Editor, *The School Government Chronicle*, 19/4/1923, NCW S1: Monk, 32. In 1923 donations were made by the King and Queen, City Companies and a number of girls' schools. A small number of scholarships were established.

²⁶ Letter to Treasury 30/4/1929, ED32/932 NA.

²⁷ Monk, 51.

²⁸ Memorandum 21/2/1929, ED32/932 NA.

²⁹ Monk, 51.

³⁰ Report of HMI Visit 23/2/1938, ED32/1095 NA.

³¹ Monk, 15.

³² Interview Alice.

³³ Simon, *Politics*, 318, has described the Board as, 'geared from the start to programme secondary education only for an elite with, for the majority, merely ancillary provision to promote togetherness in the tasks of making capitalist industry and social relations work.'

³⁴ Report CW 26/4/1932, ED32/932 NA.

³⁵ Quoted in Pugh, 216-7

³⁶ Record of visit 23/2/1938, NA ED32/1095.

³⁷ Letter quoted in the CW Board of Governors' minutes, 23/2/1933, NCW.

³⁸ Monk, 50.

³⁹ Report CW 26/4/1932, ED32/932 NA.

⁴⁰ Letter from W.McG Eagar of NIB to Secretary of Board of Education, 5/2/1938, ED32/1095 NA.

⁴¹ Board of Education memorandum 6/2/1936, Report of HMI visit 23/2/1938. ED32/1095 NA.

⁴² Snapshot Deavin collection, B1 NCW.

⁴³ Chapter 3.2.

⁴⁴ Pearson, 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁶ Mabel Green, 'Sir Arthur Pearson – a Personal Memory', *The New Beacon* 55 (1971): 655.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* He chose to sit beside her at the staff dinner for the end of the war.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ P. Summerfield, 'Cultural Reproduction in the Education of Girls: a Study of Girls' Secondary Schooling in Two Lancashire Towns, 1900-50,' in Hunt, *Lessons*, 167.

⁵⁰ 'Personalities in the world of the Blind. Phyllis Monk,' *Beacon* XIII, no.146 (Feb. 1929): 4.

⁵¹ Monk, 12-3.

⁵² *Ibid*, 10.

⁵³ S. Fletcher, *Women First: The Female tradition in English Physical Education 1880-1980* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), 2.

⁵⁴ Spender, 23

⁵⁵ Monk, 52

⁵⁶ Tylor had proposed Eagar as a Governor, but discussion was deferred until he was present. CW Gov Mins, 10/7/1931 NCW.

⁵⁷ *Ibid* 23/2/1933.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 25/5/1933.

⁵⁹ D.E. de Zouche, *Roedean School* (Brighton: Dolphin, 1955), 212.

'Suppressed sneeze gave away two suffragettes hiding in the Dome organ in the quest for equality' *The Argus*, Jan. 1910 [article online]; Available from http://www.theargusjobs.co.uk/the_argus/125/supplement/april/pdf/4.pdf. 30/4/2005

⁶⁰ J. Robinson, *Bluestockings* (London: Viking, 2009), 70.

⁶¹ *Cheltenham Ladies College Magazine* 44 (1923): 63-71.

⁶² Cheltenham discussed dentistry, analytical chemistry as well as housing management and the Civil Service, *Cheltenham*, (1935): 5-8, (1936), (1938): 5-7; Monk, 129. See Chapter 6.

⁶³ *Who's Who*, 1961.

⁶⁴ Eagar in his history of the movement written in the 1950s, quoted in F. Dawes, *A Cry from the Streets. The Boys' Club Movement in Britain from the 1850s to the present day* (Hove: Wayland, 1975), 13

⁶⁵ Dawes, 13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ W.McG Eagar, 'Fitness – for what?', *The Boy* 7 (1934): 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 5-6.

⁶⁹ P. Brendon, *The Dark Valley* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 170.

⁷⁰ 'Nazi creed for women', *Daily Mail*, 3/7/1933

⁷¹ 'My struggle by Adolf Hitler,' *The Times*, 31/10/1933.

⁷² Eagar, *Boy* (June 1934): 7.

⁷³ M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 209.

⁷⁴ M. Pugh, *'We Danced All Night': A Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London: Bodley Head, 2008), 175.

⁷⁵ By 1934 Mary Bagot Stack's organisation had 47,000 members.

⁷⁶ Letter 19/10/1943, ED32/1095 NA.

⁷⁷ Eagar to Dr. Underwood of Board of Education, 4/11/1943, ED32/1095 NA.

⁷⁸ Monk, 51. Eagar retired in 1949 and was replaced by his deputy.

⁷⁹ *CW Magazine* 1939-40: 6

⁸⁰ Monk, 102: Former students confirm the emphasis placed upon posture at this time, interview Alice and Muriel.

⁸¹ Snapshot Deavin collection. Robinson, 134.

⁸² M. Price and N. Glenday, *Reluctant Revolutionaries* (London: Pitman, 1974), 80-2.

Zouche was at Wolverhampton High School. Tanner took over at Roedean in 1924.

⁸³ F. Hunt, 'Divided Aims: the Educational Implications of Opposing Ideologies in Girls' Secondary Schooling, 1850-1940,' in F. Hunt (ed.), *Lessons for Life. The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 3-21.

⁸⁴ Monk, 10.

⁸⁵ G. Weiner, *Feminisms In Education An Introduction* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 53.

⁸⁶ Winifred Deavin had attended Ranelagh Grammar School and taught at a girls' boarding school at Frinton. Miss McConnell and Miss Briscoe had attended Croham Hurst School.

⁸⁷ Monk, 9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 19. A speaker at the 1942 Association of Headmistresses Conference asserted that 'boarding schools could give invaluable training'. 188/1/16/1 MRC.

⁸⁹ 'Personalities Phyllis Monk', *Beacon*: 5.

⁹⁰ Monk is mentioned as having worked at a 'famous school' in 'Country Mansion for Sightless Girls', Source unidentified, Sept. 1921, NCW S1. 'Personalities: Phyllis Monk':

⁹¹ Katherine Whitehorn, quoted in L. Blandford, 'Making of a lady' in *World of the Public School*, 199.

⁹² Zouche, 40, 72. For its first thirty-nine years, the three Lawrence sisters were jointly in charge.

⁹³ Price and Glenday, 74.

⁹⁴ Monk, 54-5. Sport-X did not survive as Blind sport developed. The rules are included in Monk, 143-5.

⁹⁵ M. Cole, *Growing Up Into Revolution* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1949), 29-30; 'Phyllis Monk,' *Beacon*, repeated in Monk, 55.

⁹⁶ M. Cole, 27, 31-2. The 1912 HMI report recorded that the majority of the previous year's leavers remained at home. Roedean School Inspection Report 5-8 Nov. 1912, ED109/60 NA.

⁹⁷ F. Hunt, 'Social class and the grading of schools, realities in girls' secondary education 1880-1940,' in J. Purvis (ed.), *The Education of Girls and Women History of education Conference Papers 1984* (Leicester: History of Education Society, 1985), 27

⁹⁸ July 1937 ED32/932 NA. Towse was aiming his appeal at male colonial officials and expatriates who would consider sending their children to school in Britain. By 1939, there was a girl from Central China and another from Canada.⁹⁸

⁹⁹ This preoccupation was a result of the work of eugenisists and placed additional demands on the education of girls. Hunt, "Divided Aims," 9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ The 'polish' to be gained is expressed for example in A. Brazil, *For the Sake of the School* (London: Blackie and Son, 1915).

¹⁰² Monk, 48.

¹⁰³ P. Monk 'Address to the Southern Branch, CTB,' *Teacher* XVII (1928): 185.

¹⁰⁴ Monk, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Price and Glenday, 85, 70.

¹⁰⁶ Monk, 65.

¹⁰⁷ Comment made by Mary in conversation, July 2004; role described in Monk, 48.

¹⁰⁸ Monk, 61

¹⁰⁹ M. Cole, 30-1: Zouche, 83-4.

¹¹⁰ Upcott, *Memories*, Braille Vol. 1, 78: Monk, 60.

¹¹¹ Monk, 60.

¹¹² Price and Glenday, 85-6

¹¹³ C. Watkins, 'Inventing International Citizenship: Badminton School and the Progressive Tradition between the Wars', *History of Education*, 36 (2007), 319.

¹¹⁴ Monk, 47

¹¹⁵ A. Jacobs and J. Goodman, 'Music in the "common" life of the school: towards an aesthetic education for all in English girls' secondary schools in the Interwar period,' *History of Education* 35 (2006), 677.

¹¹⁶ Watkins, 319.

¹¹⁷ Editorial and Esperanto Group item, CW mag, 1934-5. Monk, 47.

¹¹⁸ Watkins, 315.

¹¹⁹ Fish, *Way Ahead*, 6.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹²¹ S. Delamont, "The Beech-covered hillside: Self-presentation in the Histories of the Girls' Schools,' in G. Walford (ed.), *The Private Schooling of Girls Past and Present* (London: Woburn, 1993), 79.

¹²² P. Hurle, *Malvern Girls' College A Centenary History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1993), 45-6.

¹²³ 'School in Beauty Spot Equipping Blind girls for life's tasks'; 'Blind Girls. A New College. "The Cedars"'. Sources unidentified, Sept. 1921, NCW S1.

¹²⁴ Pearson, letter, *The Times*, 24/6/1920.

¹²⁵ Monk, 12

¹²⁶ Price and Glenday, 77.

¹²⁷ L. James, *The Middle Class A History* (London: Abacus, 2008), 378.

¹²⁸ Letter to Editor, *The Times*, 24/6/1920.

¹²⁹ Monk, 28.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 9.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 10.

¹³² Payne, 305.

¹³³ *The Woman's Leader*, 13/10/1922 in BA12004 WRO.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

¹³⁵ CW Inspection 1925, 4-5, BA12004 2(ix) WRO

¹³⁶ Monk, 122. The historian of Malvern Girls' College considers that the headmistress of the late 1930s almost expected a 'lifetime's commitment' of her staff, Hurle,

¹³⁷ Monk, 78.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 49

¹³⁹ See Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁰ Upcott, *Memories*, Braille Vol. 2, 2-3 and Vol. 1, 83.

¹⁴¹ Monk, 49. Rule VI (G), Association of Headmistresses, Minutes of Education Committee, 11/7/1925. MSS 188/2/1/2 MRC.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 73.

¹⁴³ Delamont, *Knowledgeable*, 101.

¹⁴⁴ Delamont, *Woman's Place*, 127.

¹⁴⁵ Delamont, *Knowledgeable*, Ch. 4, refers to it as a time of 'Chaperons, gloves and cycling in skirts'.

¹⁴⁶ W.I. Candler, A.M. Jaques, and B.M. Dobbie, *King Edward VI School for Girls Birmingham* (London: Ernest Benn, 1971), 29.

¹⁴⁷ Monk, 60.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 83.

¹⁴⁹ Comment made by Alice, 23/7/2004.

¹⁵⁰ Prospectus Innisfree School for Girls, Educational Box 2, JJC.

¹⁵¹ 'Blind Children help the Red Cross Charities', Source unidentified 1943, NCW S1.

¹⁵² B1 NCW

¹⁵³ I and J were in the possessions of Winifred Deavin. They have Campbell's press studio, St. Paul's Churchyard, London stamped on the reverse. B1 NCW.

¹⁵⁴ B1 NCW.

¹⁵⁵ Reported of a fellow student by Alice. Details validated for the individual mentioned in Record of Careers, Monk, Appendix B.

¹⁵⁶ Borsay, *Disability*, 97

¹⁵⁷ Payne, 359.

¹⁵⁸ M. Lloyd, 'Does she boil eggs? Towards a Feminist Model of Disability,' *Disability, Handicap and Society* 7 (1992), 219.

6. Chorleywood College before the 1944 Act. II: An 'enabling' school for blind girls in practice?

While Chorleywood College may have promoted a positive image of itself as a girls' secondary school, the question still remains of how enabling the education was in practice for pupils with sight problems. Felicity Armstrong has focused on 'the restrictive, harsh and unstimulating regime' in special schools.¹ Was Chorleywood, more than Worcester College, promoting the '*incapacity and inability*' of the students to cope with a 'normal' education?² Indeed, Payne and Pritchard, when comparing with the secondary education provided for blind boys, have been critical of the uneven standard of attainment at Chorleywood in the 1920s and 1930s.³

As was shown in the last chapter, lack of official recognition added to the difficulties of Chorleywood's early years, with the small number and wide ability range of students hindering the provision of appropriate courses. This would slow down the development of any school, and any judgement on the education provided necessitates an examination of the extent to which the students were well-served by the curriculum. The staff of the new school can seem to be pioneers in their efforts to improve the status of education for blind girls but, given the constraints discussed in the last chapter, they could be considered to have been pragmatists, rather than radical reformers, imitating the 'liberal' curriculum and adapting it to their students.

This chapter examines whether Chorleywood College was able to ensure the higher status to be gained by providing a general education in line with that received by girls in mainstream schooling and considers whether this was 'enabling' in practice. The manner

in which students were being given the skills to cope with their visual impairment and move on successfully into higher education, suitable employment and independent adult life are essential to any judgement of the achievement of Drake's criteria for the 'disabled' to achieve full citizenship.⁴

6.1 Delivering a mainstream secondary curriculum to blind girls.

If its pupils were to be viewed as equal to their mainstream peers, Chorleywood had to have a comparable curriculum. Although there will be shown to have been weaknesses, there was no suggestion that this college for the blind was attempting to be less academically rigorous than other girls' secondary schools, with most subjects delivered in a manner that would not have depressed expectations in the manner Borsay has suggested.⁵

When Chorleywood College was established, a liberal education was presented to prospective students and their parents as allowing the pursuit of a range of academic subjects and additional activities. The first prospectus advertised the academic curriculum as including Science and Mathematics, alongside Religious Knowledge, Geography, History, English and Modern Languages. For reasons discussed in the last chapter, Miss Monk was keen to promote the cultural side of a liberal education. A broad education was to be delivered, with 'Domestic and other Arts and Crafts' taught, as well as Music, 'Gymnastics, Dancing, Gardening, and other provisions for outdoor exercise'.⁶

By the mid-1930s, there had been a slight increase in what was advertised, and more precision in what was described:

The subjects taught ... are as follows: Scripture; English; History; Geography; Mathematics (Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry) ; Elementary Science (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Physiology) ; Modern Languages (French, German); Classics; Handicrafts (Raffia and Cane Work, Clay Modelling, Pottery, Weaving, Spinning, Housecrafts); Music (Pianoforte, Class Singing, Musical Appreciation); Dancing, and Gymnastics; Typewriting. Instruction is also given in Swimming, Gardening, and Poultry-keeping.⁷

This was necessary for a school which, as will be shown in the later section on examinations, was aiming to be more academic in tone.

The school focused mainly on the Arts-based subjects, rather than on Mathematics and the Sciences, but this was not because these blind pupils were being given an inferior education; the educational emphasis was a reflection of the influence of gender and thus demonstrates the importance of considering the historical context in any analysis of education. Chorleywood's curriculum reflects priorities Felicity Hunt has identified in her studies of educational policy towards girls in the inter-war years. Hunt has emphasised the significance of a letter in which Dr. Cyril Norwood called for the girls' curriculum to be 'built on English subjects as its main foundation'.⁸ The response to Norwood's letter in the *Journal of Education* of 1933 was to clarify that this meant 'modern languages and mathematics are left out except for those with special aptitudes'.⁹ When Chorleywood students began to take Higher Certificate in the years between 1938 and 1944, most

students offered English, French, German or Latin, although two students passed History as a Main subject, and one passed Religious Knowledge.

In delivering the full curriculum the staff did have to consider the constraints imposed by problems with resources. They may have had the 'good' furniture described in Chapter 5, but there was a limited range of special equipment which they were able to use. One of the key difficulties, just as at Worcester College, was the lack of Braille materials. It was only 'sometimes possible' for each member of a class to have a copy of a text being used, and a group of women prisoners had to be recruited to produce Grade I Braille books for beginners (see Appendix A).¹⁰

The oral emphasis of modern languages must have assisted their study, although the problems of the specialist Braille contractions used did present some difficulties.¹¹ The pursuit of languages could demonstrate the manner in which the school was stretching the girls, sometimes pushing against the constraints of the time. The inclusion of German in the general curriculum pushed Chorleywood ahead of Worcester College which offered most students only French and Latin at this time.

Music was a subject which was promoted, and this can be linked to the stress on aesthetic education in interwar secondary education for girls which Jacobs and Goodman have discovered in an analysis of Mary Datchelor School.¹² The emphasis on music which was included suited a school for the blind where, as part of encouraging the appreciation of classical music, all pupils were taught to sing and play 'suitable' instruments such as the piano or one of the string instruments. However, unlike at Mary Datchelor School, there was no attempt to challenge gender perceptions of musical abilities, but instead, as Eagar

claimed, the work was predominantly cultural and recreational.¹³ Twenty per cent of Chorleywood girls achieved Grade V or above at cello or piano but their teachers asserted that blind girls did not necessarily show more of a musical aptitude than their sighted peers; they did consider that because their students needed to listen carefully, they were able to achieve greater pleasure.¹⁴ As will be discussed in Chapter Six, a few girls were to go to music colleges, but for most girls the goal was to provide an aesthetic appreciation which would give them access to the culture of the elite.

Gender perceptions were also to affect the delivery of Mathematics, even though this was an area of the education of blind and partially sighted girls in which staff saw themselves as pioneering. Phyllis Monk's school history was to have the additional purpose of providing guidance for other teachers, and the subject teacher, Winifred Deavin, described the various methods used in the teaching of arithmetic and geometry at a time when there was no means of reading immediately back over to see the working of a particular sum (Appendix A discusses the problems of using a Stainsby-Wayne machine).¹⁵ An obviously posed photograph, used in the book, illustrated the equipment in use in a Mathematics lesson and the fact that the inherent difficulties meant that this was the only subject for which students with some sight were allowed to use print. [Illustration 6-A] For braillists, a Taylor board had to be used to denote numbers, functions and letters in algebra through the placing of pegs (Appendix B). Graph boards were made of perforated zinc with small metal studs and string wire or elastic for axes, and a spurred wheel was used for geometry.¹⁶

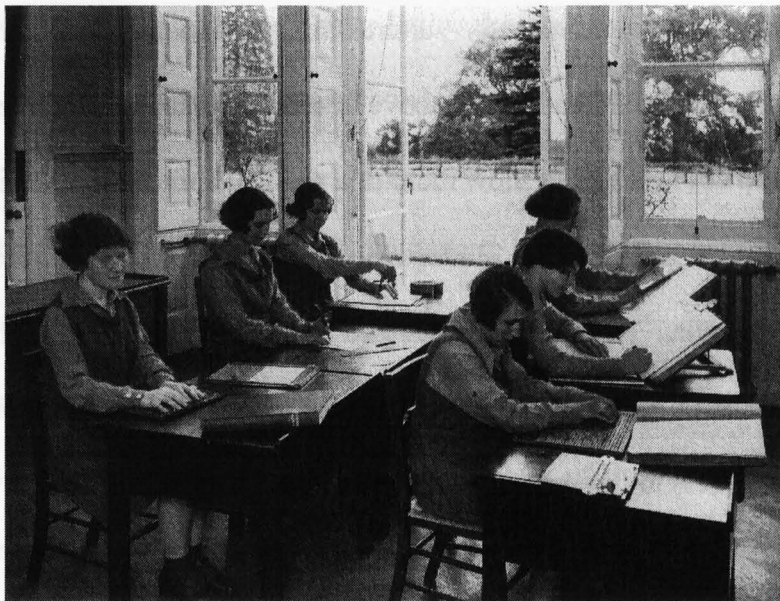


Illustration 6-A: ‘Mathematics apparatus in use by a class (1939)’. Tactile and sighted methods are in use.

Despite all these measures which did allow some Worcester College boys to do more advanced mathematical work, the manner in which the necessary modifications slowed down progress resulted in Mathematics being given a lower priority at Chorleywood. When School Certificate was first introduced, Mathematics, as well as Science, had to be tackled, but this obviously presented a challenge. School magazines from 1934 to 1939 list credits gained in individual subjects taken as part of the School Certificate, but only two girls received a Credit in Mathematics. In 1938, the regulations for School Certificate were altered so that a candidate could offer a foreign language as an alternative among the range of subjects. Between 1939 and 1944, of twenty candidates for School Certificate, only nine passed the Mathematics component.¹⁷ No student offered the subject as part of the Higher Certificate, although a few students were allowed to do some advanced study out of interest.

Winifred Deavin appears to have felt the need to make excuses for the lower position of the subject in the curriculum:

To do justice to mathematics, our girls would have needed more time than is usually allowed to the subject in a sighted school...But this extra time could only have been given at the expense of such subjects as modern languages or music, that appealed much more to the majority of the girls and in which they could reach high standards. So we let mathematics remain, for most, at a rather elementary, though useful, stage.¹⁸

This decision on educational priorities does not reflect on ideas of appropriate provision in the education of the blind, but does fit into the general status of Mathematics in mainstream girls' education at a time when senior figures, such as Norwood, were questioning its suitability.

There are other areas of the curriculum where Chorleywood College demonstrates some of the limitations which reflect those common in other girls' secondary schools of the time. Biology appears to have been the only Science taught to a School Certificate level, and, despite eighteen out of twenty candidates being listed as gaining a credit in the subject, it was not then pursued to Higher Certificate.¹⁹ This was not necessarily perceived as a weakness as the 1925 Report on the school considered the teaching of Science to be distinctly good.²⁰ Delamont has shown how the provision of laboratories and qualified staff, as well as a 'public prejudice', caused problems for many girls' schools.²¹ Croham

Hurst School, a girls' secondary school with which Chorleywood had sporting links, only offered a choice of Chemistry or Botany after the third year.²²

However, Monk also felt restricted by the nature of her new students and, with Worcester College also having been seen in Chapter Four to have limited its Science teaching, some of the obstacles for a pioneering school for the blind become evident. Phyllis Monk had been the Head of the Science department at Roedean School and was described by that school's inspectors in the weeks following her appointment as having a 'method and manner ... calculated to help the pupils'.²³ Monk had seen a number of her former sighted students go on to study medicine, but, with her new pupils, she believed only a limited range of experiments were possible; she felt that 'blindness is such an obvious barrier to much scientific work on the practical side'.²⁴ She was unhappy with the nature of the teaching of the subject as 'rather a big proportion of the time....had to be given to dictating notes' to ensure a knowledge of vocabulary.²⁵

Similar difficulties meant that not all of the academic subjects mentioned in the prospectus were taught to School Certificate level. The structure of the qualification allowed pupils to offer Scripture, History or English instead of Geography. Despite the claim that Geography was part of the curriculum, Miss Monk confessed that the nature of this subject did depend on the teacher, and it was not considered a subject for external examination. Again the time constraints were seen as the chief problem in teaching so practical a subject. Undoubtedly, the creation of tactile diagrams and models was a slow process; it necessitated considerable practical skill and expenditure of effort. However, the subject was taught at other Colleges for the Blind such as the Royal Normal College and Worcester

College; this was an omission which was the one area of disappointment for a student who otherwise achieved considerable success after transferring to Chorleywood.²⁶

As far as Mathematics and Geography were concerned, one of the problems was the size of the school. The low student numbers and the broad age range limited the number of staff and so restricted the amount of subject-specialism. Mathematics suffered as Winifred Deavin was needed to teach more Latin and Miss Monk admitted that the problem for Geography was the lack of a specialist teacher.²⁷ There was a great deal of non-specialist teaching of subjects, even with candidates for university entrance and Higher Certificate. Perhaps where academic direction was provided by syllabus demands this was possible, but where subject knowledge and deeper understanding was needed to create a coherent programme, this did cause deficiencies.

The size of the school also created problems with general levels of educational attainment. The medical factors that can impinge on progress through the education of the blind does mean that the age when examinations were taken cannot always be a guide to delays caused by the nature of the schooling, but, anecdotal evidence from former students demonstrates that, even in the late 1930s, some people were delayed in taking their school certificate because there were not sufficient students to form a School Certificate group - they had to wait until the rest of the group was ready.²⁸

Just as was shown in Chapter Four to have been the case at Worcester, the need to maintain levels of income led to the admission of students who lacked the skills and ability required to benefit from an academic secondary education.²⁹ However, with such schooling being considered essential for middle class status the secondary schools for the blind were not

alone in being affected in this way. Other girls' secondary schools often admitted students late in their educational careers and without the necessary grounding. In 1927, Wycombe Abbey was having difficulties preparing pupils for School Certificate because the average age of admission was fourteen, and forty-four of the ninety-one girls accepted had achieved less than thirty per cent in French; forty per cent of leavers in 1925-6 had attempted no public examinations.³⁰

In order to understand the limitations of the curriculum of Chorleywood, a consideration of the broader context of girls' secondary education again becomes essential. The school was preparing students in a range of subjects and enabling older students with individual needs to prepare successfully for their Higher Certificate and University Entrance. This does indicate that the school was having a far from disabling effect.

6.2 The importance of meeting external standards

Most blind students in the pre-Butler Act era experienced an elementary education and were therefore denied the opportunity which external assessment could present to demonstrate equality of potential. The growing interest shown in the acquisition of qualifications indicates the manner in which the staff of Chorleywood College found that they could not afford to be isolated from mainstream developments if the ability of their students to access a 'normal' secondary education was to be recognised.

The emphasis on a liberal education did not initially mean that examinations, and thereby careers, were the emphasis. Only ten of the fifty-nine students who left Chorleywood in the years up to the end of 1933 took School Certificate. No students at this time did Higher Certificate, although seven succeeded in gaining university entrance to Oxford and

Cambridge Colleges and the University of St. Andrews. Two took the first part of the National Froebel Union Teachers' Certificate and two students came in from abroad and gained a Certificate of Proficiency in English.³¹

Although some girls were funded by their middle and upper class parents to have the experience of secondary schooling, other girls were sent with the expectation of more quantifiable gains. This was not only the case for those supported by LEAs who were using ratepayers' money, but also many of the parents who were paying some, or all, of the fees wished to ensure that their daughters could support themselves by working. By the late 1930s, the school was entering the majority of its students for external examinations. In 1942, Inspectors commented that School Certificate was the 'goal, as it should be' and considered Phyllis Monk to be 'academic in outlook'.³² In the eleven years up to the 1944 Act, of fifty-eight leavers, thirty-five did School Certificate. At just over sixty per cent, this was behind the sixty-eight per cent achieved by the 1936-7 leavers from Wycombe Abbey, the nearby girls' public school, but was above the national average for secondary school leavers in 1935 of fifty-seven per cent.³³

Higher School Certificate was slower to appear, as it was at Roedean.³⁴ Although Alice Ottley School in Worcester entered its first students for the examinations in 1918, Chorleywood staff were perhaps more familiar, and therefore comfortable, with the university entrance examinations.³⁵ The last two Chorleywood students to achieve university entrance without Higher Certificate were in 1935 and 1937. However, by this time, State Scholarships were decided on the basis of Higher Certificate, and universities and colleges were giving preference to students who had followed the advanced course. The school then began to enter girls for Higher Certificate, sometimes alongside university

entrance or scholarship examinations, with seven successes (nearly twenty per cent) from 1938 to 1944; inspectors had described a rate of ten per cent of Wycombe Abbey students gaining Higher Certificate in 1936-7 as 'good'.³⁶

The academic credentials of the College were confirmed in 1937 when Monique Raffray gained the Fawcett scholarship and went to Somerville College, Oxford. This was only awarded every four years and recipients had tended to be students of the Royal Normal College or Worcester College, with the scholarship going to Worcester College boys in 1929 and 1933; Chorleywood College had firmly established its role as a secondary school preparing blind girls for a university education.³⁷

The College maintained its record of preparing students for other qualifications, with three taking Part I of the National Froebel Union teaching Certificate after School Certificate, and one completing the College of Teachers of the Blind Home Teachers Diploma at the same time. From 1939, Royal Society of Arts qualifications in typing and shorthand began to be taken.³⁸

Chorleywood College may have been slow to move over to formal qualifications, and its success rate was behind that of Worcester College demonstrated in Chapter Four, but they achieved a success within the criteria and context of secondary education for girls in the inter-war years. This success, and the manner in which they were developing the curriculum, was to ensure the future position as a grammar school for blind girls which will be discussed in Chapter Ten.

6.3 Creating appropriate skills for adult life

Whereas perceptions of masculinity had presented a challenge for the staff of Worcester College, educationalists trying to enable blind girls to become citizens faced more substantial problems linked to gender perceptions of femininity. Achievement in examinations can never be the sole criteria for evaluating the success of any form of education. For the education of students with a visual impairment, an important feature is the ability to prepare students to take a role in society. Chorleywood's rural situation, described in Chapter Five, could appear to support criticisms made by Gordon and Humphries of institutions in remote rural locations where contact with the outside world was minimised so that students were left segregated, isolated and unable to integrate back into society.³⁹ However, an examination of the broader, and 'hidden', curriculum of Chorleywood would suggest that this was not the case, although again there were weaknesses which reflected the need to demonstrate equality by paralleling mainstream practice.

One skill which would be crucial to successful integration into a society which, as writers such as Oliver have shown, made few adjustments for 'disability', would be communication with sighted people.⁴⁰ Although all students, even those with some sight, were mainly taught through the medium of Braille, the importance of being able to produce materials in print was recognised. From their years in middle school, students were taught typing. Typewriting skills could keep students in contact with friends and family, as well as being useful for preparing essays at university. In 1932, the school acquired typewriters and later Braille Shorthand machines, a significance accorded status through inclusion of a photograph of the typewriting study in the 1936 prospectus, one of only three rooms included. At Worcester College, the boys had been gaining qualifications in typewriting in

the 1920s, and the emphasis at Chorleywood can be seen as an indication that the school had to show as much practical as cultural emphasis in order to encourage the Education Authorities to fund places. Some older students, who would need to take notes in lectures, were also taught Braille shorthand (see Appendix A). Five students gained Royal Society of Arts Shorthand and typing qualifications (with two of these girls also achieving Higher Certificate). The fact that the emphasis was educational was reinforced when the governors initially refused to allow the acquisition of a Dictaphone for vocational training.⁴¹

The practical skills needed for independent living were less well-delivered as the need to follow an academic programme equal to that at other girls' secondary schools left little curriculum space. Needlework and housewifery were initially taught by the Matron in her spare time and then, in 1931, an Assistant Matron was appointed to develop the work. However, with Assistant Matrons tending to be very young and in post for a short time, this would not have added to the status given to these skills.⁴² Cooking, laundry work, housewifery and needlework were said to have a 'safe, though small' place in the curriculum, but this must have been mainly in the junior forms, as students who arrived to prepare for public examinations in the late 1930s and early 1940s felt that they had been given no training in such areas.⁴³ A group only appears to have been prepared in 1941 to take Domestic Science as part of their School Certificate.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, again this is consistent with the pattern of other girls' schools. At King Edward's School in Birmingham in 1925, only the lower school sewed and middle school cooked, with art also ending after middle school.⁴⁵ Hunt has demonstrated the impact of the fact that the Board of Education considered domestic subjects to be of an inferior

educational status. She has shown how women teachers were fearful of accusations of 'inferior performance' by girls and so had to find a solution to the dilemma in which they were placed:

It was impossible to provide an education which made an effective preparation for both work and home careers whilst the two were seen as incompatible. It was also impossible whilst girls had to achieve the same educational goals as boys, because they were hopelessly over-pressured with a 'double' curriculum.⁴⁶

The situation was more difficult for a school which had to ensure that girls conformed to the standards of secondary education, whilst they also required additional time due to slower Braille reading speeds and difficulties of accessing graphs.⁴⁷ Whereas Worcester's general response in the pre-war era was to ignore the need for practical skills, if there was pressure on the curriculum at Chorleywood College, such activities were pushed outside the school day.

The emphasis adopted with physical training was another area in which Chorleywood imitated mainstream practice rather than any other school for the blind (including Worcester College). Miss Turner, and then, from 1935, Miss McConnell had been trained at Colleges which promoted Swedish gymnastics.⁴⁸ This method was based on an understanding of anatomy and physiology and emphasised the remedial and educational role which exercise could play.⁴⁹ Similar ideas also lay behind Chorleywood's use of outdoor games, dancing, swimming and running. Dancing, with its emphasis on grace and poise was particularly promoted as an effective physical training in many girls' schools,

and the revived Greek dance of the 1920s became a staple of secondary education of the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁰

Although, as Chapter Five showed, the inclusion of photographs of dance in the prospectus was linked to a concern with the creation of image, for the physical training teachers of Chorleywood College dance was an integral part of their educational philosophy. Miss McConnell brought the concerns of the Österberg approach to the particular problems of the blind; she felt her pupils had often lacked the opportunity to develop ‘muscular co-ordination in free movement’.⁵¹ Her aim was the development of ‘an all-round normal individual, ready to lead a full life’.⁵² Therefore, she also took an interest in the maintenance of good posture inside and outside the school. She paid attention to activities such as walking and gardening, as well as the design of chairs and desks.⁵³

Team sport was also a means of promoting similarities to, and links with, other mainstream girls’ secondary schools. Miss Monk invited schools such as Croham Hurst, Wycombe Abbey and the Harrow County School to visit, learn the rules, and then play (unsurprisingly the Chorleywood girls were said to have a definite advantage in the first half while the other team fully familiarised themselves with the rules and gained practice).⁵⁴ The significance of having a sporting team was promoted (see Illustration 6-B) and would appear to suggest that the students were not completely isolated and segregated, although some students have asserted that very little mixing occurred.⁵⁵



Illustration 6-B: A Sport-X team.

Included in P. Monk *Though Land Be Out Of Sight*.

Extra-curricular activities were always going to be important in a boarding school, and this chance to live alongside the pupils, fully guiding their development, had been part of the appeal of the post of headmistress to Phyllis Monk.⁵⁶ As demonstrated in Chapter Five, Monk's Quaker attitudes did have some influence, but the emphasis was on service rather than the 'progressive' approach shown at Badminton School.⁵⁷ The Craft Guilds which met on a Wednesday afternoon were to act as a main focus for encouraging additional skills, whether through the Emergency Knowledge group or the Social Service group. Students also learnt about keeping chickens and gardening, as well as being encouraged to take an interest in nature through the Saturday afternoon walk. However, as was the case at Worcester College and other boarding schools of the time, the opportunity to take responsibility for cooking their own meals or doing their own laundry was not provided (as it undoubtedly would not have been in upper-middle class homes of the time).⁵⁸

The girls had their time organised for them in the manner which has been criticised by Borsay, but this was not denying opportunities to 'nurture individuality' as they were encouraged to develop skills by playing a role in school organisations.⁵⁹ They were not being prepared for a role of dependency or segregation from the rest of society. Staff and the school voted in elections for positions on committees, in the library and captaining the games teams. The social service group gave the girls some involvement with the community, helping others through activities such as collecting wood for ladies in almshouses nearby. In 1935 two students went to a camp organised by the Federation of University Women.⁶⁰

Students such as Suzanne Murtagh have described the benefits they gained from the social service activities, while also being critical of weaknesses in the delivery of skills such as sewing and writing. Suzanne had joined the school at the age of thirteen in the late 1920s with considerable gaps in her knowledge which were the result of difficulties created by an expectation that, despite her partial sight, she could cope in a classroom organised for those with full sight. While crediting the school with her academic achievements, she felt that she had not been properly prepared for life:

the tempo of life should be speeded up for partially sighted girls,
and they should be kept more in touch with the outside world.⁶¹

Meeting the particular needs of those with some sight does appear to have created some difficulties. Board of Education officials had recognised that, while the College was the only place providing a secondary education for blind girls, it was necessary for a very wide range of sight to be covered'.⁶² However, although half of the school had some sight, the

school was 'primarily organised' for the blind, 'whose handicap was more definite.'⁶³ Alice, a student who could still read print, was forced to learn and read Braille.⁶⁴ The Crowley Report of 1934 into the education of the partially sighted did express a fear that such children would be placed in a 'blind world' but many of the strategies adopted at Chorleywood were a response to external pressures which the guiding figures of the supervising charity did nothing to oppose.⁶⁵ Monk was later to imply that she felt bound by 'alarmist' medical advice.⁶⁶ The leading ophthalmologist, Mr. Nathaniel Bishop Harman visited the school regularly, and his standards for 'myopes' were reported by the inspectors in 1932 as being 'somewhat rigid as regards sight saving'.⁶⁷ Former students recall his influence over their education, and would have been unable to challenge his judgement.⁶⁸ While some students had to be particularly careful, others found the insistence on the use of Braille difficult and did benefit from the advice in 1941 from the new eye specialist, Mr. Maurice Whiting, that there could be 'a reasonable use of print'.⁶⁹ Undoubtedly medical issues did create additional problems for those seen as having a disability, and this did lead to medical professionals having a dominant influence. Those with some sight should have been at a definite advantage, and certainly their future career paths suggest this was the case, but the medical view of the era did limit their independence in their school years.

As far as independence in adult life was concerned, some former students have credited Chorleywood with developing the outlook necessary to enable them to cope with the challenges of integrating into society. When Ruth Hitchcock wrote her contribution to '*Though Land Be Out Of Sight*', she was writing for her peers and the staff, but seems to have weighed up what she felt she had gained in terms of her identity:

I realise now how wise our training in community life was in one particular point....In our dealings with one another, and with the staff, we were taught (all unconsciously) to behave naturally and like seeing people. We never thought of saying or thinking that we were different from other people or to be pitied.⁷⁰

However, French has still reflected on the disempowerment of children with special needs left outside the mainstream.⁷¹ She feels that students were left just as unprepared to properly take a place in society and that an approach such as this was damaging because of the way it seemed to suggest, 'be superhuman and deny your disability'.⁷² When Jane Campbell was 'playing to other people's agendas' while facing with her spinal muscular atrophy, she found it required 'considerable sacrifices' and left her feeling 'isolated and alone'.⁷³ Former Chorleywood students, such as the Oxford graduate Monique Raffray, did have to find their own strategies to cope with society's prejudices and reluctance to give them responsibility as they worked to find themselves employment.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, the school was providing a confidence and a feeling of 'personal location' which was to assist with tackling the obstacles ahead in adult life. Former students stress the opportunity which Chorleywood College gave them to compete and succeed academically and move on to take a place in the outside world.⁷⁵ While they may have felt the pressure to show they could work on a par with sighted colleagues, they had a strong sense of identity from being with other girls with sight loss and many stayed in touch with the former students association. A sense of community was established with the school magazines reporting regularly on the activities of former students.⁷⁶ This support was important in creating and maintaining the self-belief to pursue their potential at a time

when organisations for the blind were very much led by the male blind and so role models were limited.

Apart from the particular issues relating to those with some sight, Chorleywood College demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of much of the secondary education for girls at the time. Many students do seem to have benefited greatly from craft activities outside the school curriculum and former students do speak highly of some of the skills they were given in Physical Training lessons, including the importance of falling properly to avoid injury.⁷⁷ In a crammed curriculum some skills were omitted, but whether this resulted in the students being left unprepared for aspects of adult life can be partly assessed through an examination of the students and their future careers; although here again the nexus of class, gender and disability becomes critical in a manner which writers such as Borsay have failed to consider.⁷⁸

6.4 *The problem of finding a suitable job for a blind girl*

When the school authorities at Chorleywood were looking at the role to be taken by the students in adult life, the problems of disability which had faced Brown at Worcester worked alongside disadvantages which were a result of gender. When Phyllis Monk was asked to write an article about the new school for a magazine, she promoted the school as, ‘one where a liberal education and all that goes with a full school life precedes the training for professions or other careers to which it leads the way’.⁷⁹ Vocational training was never the purpose of such an education, but there was a belief that the skills and knowledge gained would create future opportunities. For girls’ schooling, there had always been an issue of the purpose it was meant to serve, and this was no clearer for girls with a visual impairment, but the Chorleywood students had not been prepared for the subservient

position assumed of special schooling by Oliver and other Social Model of Disability writers; they had the confidence to become pioneers in some fields.

When Miss Monk came to write about 'After-school careers', she demonstrated many of the same assumptions as other headmistresses educating sighted females.⁸⁰ One of the great problems for an inter-war educator planning schooling for girls was the expectation that their former pupils would only be employed for a short-time before marriage and having a family; with marriage bars in some professions, married women of the middle classes were discouraged from taking paid work outside the home.⁸¹ In the late 1930s a headmistress at a girls' secondary school expressed her frustration at the inequality of the situation:

There is...neither uncertainty nor division of aim in the education of boys, since their training as citizens and workers is not held to unfit the male automatically for exercising their functions of husband and father. To give a girl an education suited to her capacities – should she happen to be out of the ordinary – is still widely held to be at best a folly, at worst a crime, if matrimony and motherhood are in view.⁸²

In the first third of the twentieth century, headmistresses had been forced to respond to claims, influenced by Social Darwinism, that an academic education left a girl either unfit for marriage or would result in their being unwilling to have children, thus leading to 'race suicide'.⁸³ Monk had been educated at the turn of century when the debate had first emerged and was keen to show how former pupils had married and had families. However,

here she felt constrained not to respond in the same manner as other heads of girls' schools, and felt a need to respond to the eugenics debate outlined in Chapter Two. In her book, she presented the school as a responsible institution, mentioning how former students sought medical guidance before having children.⁸⁴ Again in her desire to justify her school, Miss Monk did not want to arouse controversy.

Monk also played down the fact that, whereas around sixteen percent of all women did not marry between 1921 and 1939, only twenty-six per cent of Chorleywood upper school girls were to marry.⁸⁵ Although Pugh has used the decline of emigration, and increase in the number of marriages, to question the assumption of 'surplus women' as a result of First World War casualties, there was a perception that many middle class girls, who would have married the young officers whose mortality rates were highest, were left single.⁸⁶ Nicholson mentions the willingness of some women to advertise for 'disabled' officers as potential spouses, and staff at Chorleywood in 1944 had apparently felt that in the inter-war years the Worcester boys had been able to marry sighted women, removing a potential source of husbands for blind girls.⁸⁷

For some of the first Chorleywood girls, remaining single did not present financial challenges. As was demonstrated in Chapter Five, in the early years the students were, by necessity, predominantly middle class. Checking on students is largely dependent on the anecdotal evidence of former students interviewed, but there were at least two in the late 1930s and early 1940s who did not have to work because they could live off parental money.⁸⁸ Others, such as Monique Raffray, had the economic freedom to pick and choose the work they wanted to do.⁸⁹

However, there were many other students who could not afford to stay at home, and, for these girls, gender created an additional obstacle to those faced by blind young men. Miss Monk may have asserted her view that a future career should bear 'some relation to the work that would probably have been chosen had there been no sight handicap', but she was painfully aware that gender did impact upon her students' career prospects compared to those of the boys of Worcester College:

One realised, too, that the 'Lords of Creation' were allowed, even expected, to be slightly aggressive in their claims for work – work using their ability; but that the 'gentle sex' was required to be reasonably humble in her approach, however resolute she might become once her value was established.⁹⁰

The headmistress did not feel able to push the position of blind girls too far beyond that which the pioneering women had established at the turn of the twentieth century. Despite the abilities of her students, the constraints imposed by gender and disability in inter-war society made Miss Monk cautious through into the 1930s and early 1940s. Writing after her retirement, she admitted the College did not open up new careers.⁹¹

Miss Monk felt that it was her place to consolidate the place of her pupils in the traditional careers pursued by secondary school girls, even to the extent of discouraging who might fail on a certain 'pathway' and close it off for others.⁹² Despite the success of university-educated boys from Worcester College in entering the Law, the headmistress did not consider this career 'ripe even for women with sight'.⁹³ This does show Monk's inherent conservatism because, as a consequence of the 1919 Sex (Disqualification) Removal Act,

the first women qualified to practise as a solicitor and a barrister in 1922.⁹⁴ Although numbers to qualify remained small, the way was to become open for blind girls to follow the boys, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Ten.

Miss Monk's conservatism was a reflection of her view of prevailing policy, and a result of the constraints of ensuring appropriate employment for girls who needed to be able support themselves. Undoubtedly some former students did very well academically, but then the problem came in pursuing a career. Monique Raffray has described how a number of her peers were forced by financial need to take 'dull, routine full-time jobs which did no justice to their abilities'.⁹⁵ Amongst those who left Chorleywood before 1944, sixteen were listed as finding their first employment in clerical work. Most of these girls who went to work as telephonists, shorthand typists and secretaries had School or Higher Certificate.⁹⁶

Clerical work was a source of employment favoured by the Chorleywood girls' fully sighted counterparts. Jane Lewis has assessed that, by 1931, ten per cent of women were involved in clerical work.⁹⁷ Most of these would have attended the secondary and high schools but then did not continue into higher education.⁹⁸ Hunt discovered that one-fifth of girls progressed to secretarial training after leaving Bedford High School.⁹⁹ What was less usual when looking at the careers of some Chorleywood students was that clerical work had become a necessity, rather than an option. The working class student from the Welsh valleys, mentioned in Chapter Five, was one of the first students prepared by the College for Higher Certificate, but financial need forced her to begin work as a short-hand typist rather than going on into Higher Education.¹⁰⁰

Muriel Easter's early career also illustrates some of the difficulties experienced by blind girls in the mid-twentieth century. She gained a First in Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford, but was forced to work as a shorthand typist before being encouraged to return in 1950 as the teacher of English at Chorleywood College, where she was to remain until her retirement. Ruth Hitchcock was the first woman to take a Double First in Theology at Cambridge. She did some teaching of Bible study, and by correspondence, but also had to take employment as a Braille proof-reader.

For those students with some sight, other areas of employment were available, but these did not challenge gender perceptions of appropriate work. One girl became a kennel maid and another went into flower decoration. The success of a student who had gone to be a housekeeper encouraged Monk to believe that this could be an appropriate profession for such pupils.¹⁰¹ The perceived difference in possibilities is also notable for those who entered the caring professions. Some students listed as myopes or partially sighted went into nursing and general social work, while those who were categorised as blind tended to go into physiotherapy (encouraged by the existence of the NIB Physiotherapy course) or they worked in a social care role, supporting the blind in their homes as a Home Teacher.

For those students who went into Higher Education, teaching was a major destination, but again this was predominantly an occupation pursued by those with some sight. A number of pupils went to work with sighted children, either in nursery work or teaching in schools. Of the two blind students who are listed as pursuing careers in mainstream teaching in the 1940s, one was a music teacher and the other initially went back to Mauritius.

For blind former students, there were obstacles which came from those within the special educational world. Positive comments were made in the school history, at a time when she was still teaching, about the contribution of the former student Alice Cunningham, but there was some comment in an HMI report about the level of support a blind member of staff required. At the time, this was said to have put Miss Monk off teaching as a career for her blind students, but she did encourage two former students to return as visiting music teachers.¹⁰² The Headmistress's proposal that one of them should become a full-time Head of Music was one of the instances, discussed in Chapter Five, which caused Eagar to question Monk's leadership to the Board of Education. The Secretary-General of the NIB considered that music could be 'sacrificed to the professional advantage of old girls'.¹⁰³ His lack of confidence in the ability of the former student was supported by HMI Winn who reported that she was unsuitable for a move up to such an important full-time post, but, given the fact that she gained an ARCM and LRAM from the Royal College of Music and was to work with sighted students, the grounds for the judgement can perhaps be questioned.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, other former pupils, and particularly those categorised as blind, were to work in special schools with considerable success. These included not only Muriel Easter, but also Marjorie Wood (Major) who taught at Dorton House School and Mary Bonham, who, having gained a Froebel qualification, was to specialise in students with multiple handicaps. Miss Bonham was involved from the start at Condoover Hall, the school opened by the NIB for multi-handicapped children with sight loss. As a result of this experience, and her involvement in international conferences, she was invited to become a member of the Vernon Committee which reported on the education of the Visually Handicapped in 1972.

Chorleywood students had been given skills which they were able to use when given the opportunity. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Seven, the Second World War provided temporary opportunities for more steady work and responsibility which many 'disabled' people were to seize.¹⁰⁵ One student, who had previously taken a number of nursery posts became a Superintendent of nursery schools and was to become an infant school teacher after the war. Another, who had been in nursery school training, joined the civil nursing reserve and moved on to become a chiropodist. However, as was true for many other women, after wartime service in school or nursing positions, or as agricultural officers, they had to go back to their former employment or remain at home.

Undoubtedly, the path into the adult world did contain additional obstacles and considerations for the girls of Chorleywood College. Outside work with other students with sensory disabilities, there was limited success. Their education provided the opportunity to go on to a range of further educational establishments, but when it came to finding employment life became more difficult. The girls had developed skills but had problems gaining the opportunities needed to capitalise on them. By the late 1930s, Miss Monk appeared more and more to be an enterprising follower, twenty years behind the wake of others, intimidated by all that restricted the prospects of all girls and particularly those considered by society and its employers to be disabled.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the school had begun to open up opportunities in professional occupations which would not have been available for blind girls. The school had begun to make its presence felt, promoting methods of provision in secondary education, which was to be crucial when more students gained such opportunities post-1944.

6.5 Impact of the school

Just as with Worcester College, part of promoting the potential of Chorleywood students had to be in challenging perceptions of 'disability' and in order to do this Miss Monk was aware that the school needed to have a broader impact on the education of blind children. Although there was an assumption at the start that the school did not need teachers with experience of working in the schools for the blind, they did visit elementary schools, including the BRIB Carpenter Road School, and Phyllis Monk paid tribute to some of the pupils' independence.¹⁰⁷ Whilst there was no intention to imitate the elementary schools of the blind, the new college could not afford to alienate a potential source of new students and staff did want to assert its distinct place amongst special schools for the blind. In doing this, Chorleywood College was able to go against Tomlinson's assertion of the limitations of individual agency by doing 'good' to the 'group' through influencing developments in the education of the blind.¹⁰⁸

Members of staff could not stay indifferent to the position of the CTB and thereby had to develop a level of expertise. They had to complete the examination within two years of starting at Chorleywood. Some staff left before they had passed, but others went on to take a senior role in the field. Miss Knatchbull was to go on to become headmistress of a school for blind boys in Cyprus. Although Winifred Deavin had initial reservations about devoting herself to the area of special education, aware of the damage it could do to her career, she was later to join His Majesty's Inspectorate where she became an expert on the education of the blind and partially sighted.¹⁰⁹ Miss McConnell became involved in the promotion of methods for the physical training of the blind. After Eagar had written expressing his concern (as described in Chapter Five), McConnell had little choice but to respond positively to the additional interest taken by the Board, but she did point out that

such involvement on the behalf of the inspectorate could only help the cause of blind children in schools across the country. She expressed her concern that ‘so little seemed to be done about this question’, demonstrating a broader interest in these issues.¹¹⁰ She became an examiner for the School Teachers’ Certificate Examination of the College of Teachers of the Blind and visited other special schools. She lectured on physical training for the blind and attended a number of international conferences on the education of blind children.¹¹¹

The role staff were playing in developing methods which could be used in the wider field of education for the blind was considered to be an important feature of the established school. Unlike the book written by Mary Thomas about Worcester College, Phyllis Monk’s was not designed to be a straightforward history as a substantial element was aimed at ‘parents, educationists and social workers’. The aim was to provide them with detail on methods adopted so that ‘through this detail they will discover the way blind children attack the stumbling blocks that lie before them as they seek to find an independence that alone will convey them into “sighted life”’.¹¹² The descriptions of the areas of the curriculum demonstrate a desire to provide a record of the problems encountered, as well as the solutions which had been devised.

Jean McEwan’s contribution to the book makes it obvious that this attention to educational detail allowed the College to promote the potential of its students:

It was good for the outside world to know the special methods by which children without sight read, write, do arithmetic, to be made

aware that they learn languages, have skills in arts and crafts, swimming and country-dancing.¹¹³

This concern to proselytize was reflected in the number of visitors. In 1937, a group of sixty included medical professionals and representatives of blind organisations and other groups interested in special education. The following year 150 delegates from a Conference of Headmistresses meeting nearby arrived.¹¹⁴ Such contacts may have played a vital role in asserting the right of their students to have access to future opportunities, but must also have influenced the thinking which allowed the school to be designated as a grammar school as part of the reorganisation resulting from the 1944 Education Act.

Of course, in its early years a primary motivation behind the promotion of the College was its survival, but, by the time Monk's book was published, Chorleywood's future seemed assured by its position as grammar school for blind girls. Monk was also safeguarding her own reputation as a pioneer, but the publication by the NIB shows an awareness of the position of the College. This national charity was working for the blind and was aware of how the use of such schools could forward its own goals, and significance, in the broader field of education. Chorleywood was demonstrating the possibility of providing an academic curriculum to blind girls.

6.6 Summary: Enabling or Disabling?

Any form of segregated education can be presented as pushing its students into a 'disabled identity', and, by its promotion of thoughts of an inability to cope in mainstream education, encouraging negative feelings and denial.¹¹⁵ Phyllis Monk's interference in students' career plans could appear to fit in with a model which accuses special education of

disadvantaging and denying choices, but simply to accuse a school such as Chorleywood as being part of a disabling conspiracy is to ignore some of the broader context and some of the other comments made by former students.¹¹⁶ Assessments made by former students do fit in with French's reflection that students who went to Chorleywood (or Worcester) generally had a more positive experience than those who went to other special schools.¹¹⁷

The College was not working on assumptions of inability in the blind. Chorleywood was playing a role in enabling its blind girls through helping to challenge some of the barriers in attitudes and practices which confronted them so that they were able to take employment in some of the same roles as their sighted counterparts. At Chorleywood, there was an attempt to listen to the girls, implying a respect and consideration which encouraged the development of an individual identity. Phyllis Monk speaks of an open door policy, inviting students to talk to her about any problems, and this is borne out in conversations with former students.¹¹⁸ The lack of segregation was evident in the appointment of former students as teachers. Where students' lives appear by our standards to be closely managed, this was a reflection of general educational practice in the 1930s and 1940s. A headmistress of Malvern Girls College could speak openly at a Speech Day in 1937 of the good of adopting a tough policy of enforced obedience:

It does not hurt them to be asked sometimes to do hard, uncoaxed,
uncomplimented work.¹¹⁹

Again, just as with Worcester College, the importance of considering the context becomes evident. There were limitations to the education provided, created by restricted finances and the need to be seen to deliver an academic curriculum, but any judgement on the nature

of the education which was provided in this early twentieth century special school also has to recognise the impact of the constraints which perceptions of gender as well as disability represented for the headmistress and her staff. Throughout the inter-war period, Chorleywood College was delivering the main components of a liberal education and allowing its students to gain the recognised qualifications and skills which differentiated them from most other recipients of special education.

With her students facing the ‘double discrimination’ of gender and disability, Miss Monk probably needed to be a conservative reformer, rather than one of the ‘reluctant revolutionaries’ whom Price and Glenday have described as pioneering the secondary education of sighted girls.¹²⁰ She was demonstrating considerable caution in her strategy, but she was knocking down some of the barriers which were preventing blind girls from asserting their right to benefit from the same type of secondary schooling which had been accepted as an option for blind boys. Chorleywood’s work made sure that the possibility of an academic secondary education would be available for blind girls when the 1944 Act established secondary schooling for all.

6.7 References

¹ F. Armstrong, 'Historical development', 441 and 445.

² Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 20

³ Payne, 360; Pritchard, 200.

⁴ See Ch. 1.5.

⁵ Borsay, *Disability*, 97.

⁶ Monk, 11.

⁷ CW prospectus, c. 1936.

⁸ Hunt, *Gender*, 112

⁹ *Journal of Education*, 65, 769, (1933): 535, quoted in Hunt, 112-3

¹⁰ Monk, 101, 35-6.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 115-6.

¹² Jacobs and Goodman, 669-87.

¹³ Eagar letter to Underwood of Ministry 19/10/43, ED32/1095.

¹⁴ Monk, 117-8, Appendix B.

¹⁵ Upcott describes this goal in Monk, 5.

¹⁶ Methods described Monk, 110.

¹⁷ *CW magazine*, 1939-44.

¹⁸ Monk, 111.

¹⁹ *CW magazine*, 1936-44.

²⁰ CW inspection, 1925, BA2004 2(IX) WRO.

²¹ Delamont, *Woman's place*, 99.

²² Croham Hurst School, report of inspection, 19-21 May 1937, ED109/5606. NA

- ²³ Roedean inspection, 1912, ED109/60 NA. Monk must be the 'newly appointed mistress' described, 10.
- ²⁴ Monk, 114.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113
- ²⁶ Interview Muriel.
- ²⁷ Monk, 113.
- ²⁸ Interview Muriel.
- ²⁹ Monk, 15
- ³⁰ Wycombe Abbey School, report of inspection 1-4 March 1927, ED109/2075 NA.
- ³¹ Monk, Appendix B.
- ³² Report of the visit of HMI J. Lumsden, 8/7/1942, ED32/1095 NA.
- ³³ Wycombe Abbey School, report of inspection 31^s May-3 June 1938, ED109/208 NA.
- ³⁴ Roedean entered its first four students for Higher Certificate in 1938. Roedean School, Report of inspection, 16-9 May 1938 ED109/6002 NA.
- ³⁵ V. Noake, *History of the Alice Ottley School Worcester* (Trinity, 1952), 115-6.
- ³⁶ Wycombe report, 1938.
- ³⁷ List of Fawcett Scholarship recipients, BA12156 WRO
- ³⁸ Monk, Appendix B.
- ³⁹ Humphries and Gordon, 80
- ⁴⁰ Oliver, *Understanding*, 33.
- ⁴¹ CW Gov mins, 24/10/1930.
- ⁴² CW magazines of the 1930s provide an indication of the frequent turnover of some posts.
- ⁴³ Monk, 59: Conversation Muriel and Alice.

⁴⁴ In this year, all three students gained a credit, CW magazine, 1940-1.

⁴⁵ Candler et al,

⁴⁶ Hunt, *Gender*, 140

⁴⁷ J. Lorimer, 1962, concluded that even better Braille readers were only able to achieve 55% of the reading speed of average sighted readers. Quoted in E. Chapman, *Visually Handicapped Children and Young People*, (London: RKP, 1978), 74-5.

⁴⁸ Dartford and Chelsea Training Colleges respectively.

⁴⁹ Fletcher, *Women First*, 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Monk, 120.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ W. Deavin, 'Obituary on F. McConnell', *The New Beacon* 74 (July-Aug 1990): 878.

⁵⁴ CW magazine, 1937.

⁵⁵ Interview Anne.

⁵⁶ Monk, 17

⁵⁷ See Chapter 5.4.

⁵⁸ A British debutante at a Finishing School recorded being sent to the Cordon Bleu Institute to learn 'haute cuisine' when 'most of us had never even tried our hand at boiling an egg'. C. Bielenberg, *The Past is Myself*, (London: Corgi, 1984), 17.

⁵⁹ Borsay, 114.

⁶⁰ Monk, 72.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 87.

⁶² CW Gov Mins, 28/5/1936.

⁶³ Monk, 44.

⁶⁴ French, *Oral History*, 74.

⁶⁵ *Report Partially Sighted*, (1934), 49: Monk, 83-7.

⁶⁶ Monk described the advice given in the 1940s as 'less alarmist', *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁷ Report of visit 26/4/1932, ED32/932 NA.

⁶⁸ Interview Muriel and Alice.

⁶⁹ Monk, 28.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷¹ Cook et al, 'Voices', 296, 294.

⁷² French, 'Rainbow', 73.

⁷³ Campbell and Oliver, 184-5.

⁷⁴ Raffray, Ch. 7.

⁷⁵ Interview Muriel and Alice.

⁷⁶ CW magazines.

⁷⁷ Interview Muriel and Alice.

⁷⁸ Borsay, 97.

⁷⁹ *The Woman's Leader*, 13/10/1922, BA12004 WRO.

⁸⁰ Monk, Ch. X.

⁸¹ Hunt, *Gender*, 150.

⁸² M.G. Clarke, 'Feminine Challenge in Education', in *The Headmistress Speaks*, 59, quoted in Hunt, 'Social class', 28.

⁸³ Delamont, *Knowledgeable*, 146.

⁸⁴ Monk, 135.

⁸⁵ Pugh, *We Danced*, 127. Monk, 135.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, viii, 127: V. Nicholson, *Singled Out* (London: Penguin, 2008), 20-1.

⁸⁷ Nicholson, 88: Comments from Dorothy McHugh, 1/2/1967. Track 5, MS4000/6/1/54/102/C, CPA. 53% of boys who left Worcester between 1922 and 1944 and joined the Old Boys Union had married by 1949, 'Detailed Membership List of the Worcester College for the Blind Old Boys' Union', 1/1/1949, FC2 NCW.

⁸⁸ Interview Alice.

⁸⁹ M. Raffray, *Blindness and Beyond* (Peterborough: RNIB Daisy book, 2004), Ch. 7

⁹⁰ Monk, 127

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 128

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ The first female solicitor was Carrie Morrison and barrister was Helena Normanton.

⁹⁵ Raffray, Ch. 7

⁹⁶ Monk, Appendix B.

⁹⁷ J. Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1984), 156.

⁹⁸ Hunt, *Gender*, 151-2.

⁹⁹ Hunt, 'Social',

¹⁰⁰ Monk, Appendix B.

¹⁰¹ Monk, 139.

¹⁰² Report of visit 26/4/1932, ED32/932 NA.

¹⁰³ Letter 19/10/1943, ED32/1095 NA.

¹⁰⁴ Letter Winn to Underwood, 25/10/1943, ED32/1095 NA: Monk, Appendix B.

¹⁰⁵ Humphries and Gordon, 132.

¹⁰⁶ HMIs noted this wariness and, while they considered there was a 'slight tendency to concentrate too much on massage and typewriting as future occupations', they were more concerned about possible disappointment if no positions were available, rather than wishing to promote other professions. Visit 23/2/1938, ED32/1095 NA.

¹⁰⁷ Monk, 13.

¹⁰⁸ Tomlinson, *Profile*, 130.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 121.

¹¹⁰ Note included with Eagar's letter to HMI Perry, 19/11/1943, ED32/1095 NA.

¹¹¹ Winifred Deavin, Obituary for F. McConnell, *The New Beacon* 74 (1990): 878: International Conference of Educators of the Blind, *The Education of Blind Youth. Proceedings of the International Conference of Educators of Blind Youth* (London: NIB, 1952), 85.

¹¹² Introduction by Gwen Upcott in Monk, 5.

¹¹³ Monk, 73.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁵ Shakespeare, 104.

¹¹⁶ Morris has asserted, 'Perhaps one of the biggest barriers ... is when it is assumed that impairment means that it is not possible for the young person to make choices'. J. Morris, *'That kind of life'? Social exclusion and young disabled people with high levels of support needs* (London, Scope 2001), 19.

¹¹⁷ French, 115.

¹¹⁸ Monk: Conversation with Muriel and Alice.

¹¹⁹ Hurle, 65.

¹²⁰ Lloyd, 219: Price and Glenday.

Part Two: The Impact of the 1944 Education Act on Schools for the Blind

7. The Post-War World and the Schools for the Blind

Whereas the provision of secondary education for blind children had to be aimed towards a predominantly fee-paying elite in the inter-war period, the 1944 Education Act was to provide secondary schooling for all children deemed educable.¹ As will be discussed in Chapters Eight and Ten, both Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges were designated as grammar schools and entered an era of assured funding. The significance of these changes to these two secondary schools for the blind after 1944 can only be determined in the context of the impact of the Second World War on Britain. The Act and changes in society which had resulted from the shared experiences of wartime created openings for blind young people, but as life got back to normality in the post-war years, some of the restrictions evident in Part One of the thesis again asserted themselves.

The impact of the 1944 Butler Education Act on mainstream schooling has been the subject of many conflicting judgements. The provisions of an Act making secondary education generally available were portrayed at the time as a progressive step forward which brought 'the throwing open' of 'educational opportunity to all on equal terms'.² Recently, some elements of the press and public have harked back to the perceived educational standards of the tripartite system.³ David Bell, the Chief Inspector of Schools, described the Act in a speech on the sixtieth anniversary of its passing, as a 'landmark piece of social and welfare legislation'.⁴ However, for many historians, since Simon described the Act as 'the old order in a new guise', the 1944 reform was simply preserving some of the existing class divisions.⁵

For historians of disability too, the effects of the 1944 Act have been interpreted in different ways. Cole has followed a more traditional approach by showing the Government acting in a benevolent manner in furthering the development of opportunities for most groups in special education by extending the number of categories for whom provision had to be made from four to eleven.⁶ He considers that the requirement for secondary schooling ensured that the quality of education in the former elementary schools for the blind was raised. Revisionist views have recognised some changes but continue to stress the problems of a segregation which kept 'disabled' people in an inferior position. Tomlinson has viewed the new structure as leading to 'selection by disability', with medical and psychological personnel gaining precedence over education in the new 'strategic power-play'.⁷ Borsay has also adopted a Marxist approach when looking at the 1944 Act, considering that a 'hierarchical structure' was preserved.⁸ Armstrong, taking a more post-revisionist perspective, has agreed with Tomlinson that the post-war period, with the creation of the National Health Service, increased the importance of 'experts' in medicine who took the key role in designating categories of disability.⁹ She acknowledges that the Act brought special schools into the wider educational framework, but condemns 'social exclusion through labelling mechanisms', which created 'deviant and marginalized identities'.¹⁰

However, Armstrong's work would also suggest that the radical revisionist approach has tended to fail to consider the impact of the altered context of the late 1930s and early 1940s. She has perceived a 'complex and discontinuous' history of special education, and has highlighted the manner in which war has played a 'curiously progressive role in allowing greater freedom and opportunity to oppressed groups'.¹¹ She has identified a changed social climate linked to the desire to level off differences as a part of national

reconstruction, and assisted by the possibility that disabled people had become more 'normal' in the context of wartime injuries.¹² In this context, the post-war period could appear less hostile for the children of Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges.

In order to assess the reality of Armstrong's assessment, it has been necessary to examine the role played not only by war and the Education Act, but also by relationships among the providers of special education. The existing picture of the history of schooling for the 'disabled' does not examine the extent of divisions within special education itself. Previous studies have not looked in detail at the discussions which were taking place between the charities and Government officials in the 1930s and early 1940s. Sutherland in her study of policy-making towards disabled groups in the inter-war years has described a 'retreat' from Government involvement, with no central direction until after the Second World War.¹³ Hall has considered that Government officials saw no need to reconsider the situation in the documents preceding the 1944 Act as they felt that any issues had been highlighted in the 1930s reports on the education of the partially sighted, the deaf and the 'mentally deficient'.¹⁴ However, the fact that an intricate network of interests was able to survive the implementation of the new Act does suggest that the war-time negotiations were of significance.

7.1 'Confusion and Uncertainty': The Evolving Role of the State in the 1930s

An assessment of schooling for the blind after the 1944 Act does need to go back to the discussions, and conflicts, which took place in the late 1930s. During this decade a more rational approach had been called for in education, but the complexity of the relationships between the providers involved was to have an impact on how the new Ministry of

Education was to develop its provision for all blind students, including those of Worcester and Chorleywood. Problems with the structure of education for blind children had been highlighted to the Board of Education by the CTB and NIB, and officials were to bear the discussions in mind when reviewing schooling for the post-war world. The State had been playing a role, but the voluntary sector had maintained an important position which it was determined to protect. Indeed, relations between charities and the Board demonstrated a 'confusion and uncertainty' similar to that evident to Phillips in his history of the provision of welfare for the blind.¹⁵

During the late 1930s, the Board of Education was drawn into the tensions of 'vested interests' within the voluntary sector. As was demonstrated in Chapters Three and Five, the Board had been influencing the charity-run special schools through inspections and central funding. Nevertheless, the greatest impact of Government policy had come from the increased post-natal and school medical inspection which had reduced the number of school-age children who were blind by twenty-four per cent from 1923 to 1932.¹⁶ In 1936, a joint CTB and NIB Report claimed that, with thirty-three per cent of places in elementary schools for the blind unfilled, there was a need for consolidation into larger establishments capable of more 'efficient organization'.¹⁷ They focused particularly on the Manchester area where there were ten schools for the blind and 302 vacancies in the accommodation available for 908 children between the ages of five and sixteen.¹⁸ The writers weighed up the possibility of reform on the lines of the Hadow Report, with its suggestion of establishing a break between primary and secondary education at the age of eleven, but considered the 'administrative difficulties' so 'formidable' that a large all-age school was 'the more desirable' as well as the 'more possible'.¹⁹

The Report Committee included representatives of the Boards of Education and Health, but it was predominantly an NIB and CTB collaboration. This suggested a unity of interest amongst the different schools and charities which did not in fact exist. Whereas the Report had begun under Eichholz, the former HMI who had no particular allegiance to any institution despite his nomination by the NIB, it continued with the Honorary Secretary of the CTB, Dr. J.M. Ritchie of the London Society, as Chairman. Powerful organisations such as the NIB and the London Society had a position of influence, and a fund-raising ability, which were dependent on maintaining a strong role in education. These rival 'vested interests' were to interpret the Report in their own ways and, while the rest of Britain was anxiously watching the international situation after the Sudetenland Crisis of September 1938, they competed for the attention of Board officials.

The London Society tried to use the Report to justify opening a new large school in the metropolitan area which was to be the first of several large 'multiple-bias units' taking juniors and preparing older students for university entrance.²⁰ The NIB saw this as a threat to its own position and lobbied the Board with its own plans. Ben Purse, the Honorary Secretary General of the National Association of Blind Workers and a member of the 1936 Report Committee, began by raising the concerns over the vacant spaces in the schools for the blind. Eagar, another NIB Committee member, had then pursued this through his personal contacts with the Parliamentary Secretary.²¹ Both Purse and Eagar were critical of the 'specious form of propaganda' claiming of a need for a new school in the south. As Board officials recognised, the involvement of the Association of Blind Workers was not from a disinterested perspective as Purse was a member of the NIB Executive Council and had represented the organisation in previous discussions.²² This left the Board between two powerful forces as Ritchie, Superintendent and Secretary of the

London Society, used his position with the CTB to offer their 'expertise and advice'; but, as the events of 1945 will be shown to prove, he was not above putting his organisation's school first.²³

The proposed London Society school was not only feared by the NIB because of its potential impact on numbers at the charity's two secondary schools for the blind, but also for its effect on their plans to open another school for the 'mentally retarded' blind; many of their potential pupils were currently in special classes at the existing elementary special schools.²⁴ Although the 1918 Education Act had made the provision of schooling mandatory for the mentally 'defective', the CTB/NIB Report had highlighted the lack of effective consideration of specific provision for children with multiple handicaps.²⁵ Schools such as those operated by the BRIB did often have a class for 'backward children', but, when pupils were felt to be 'mentally subnormal and probably ineducable', pressure was put on the LEAs to withdraw them.²⁶ This was not the only group who were having problems, the head of the BRIB kindergarten also expressed concerns about the staff's ability to deal with 'physically defective children'.²⁷

Board officials were not indifferent to requests for rationalisation and reform of schools for the blind. During the Depression the Ray Committee on Local Expenditure had highlighted the need to close some of the smaller schools for the blind and deaf.²⁸ Reports had been commissioned by the Board of Education to investigate perceived gaps in appropriate provision for the 'feeble-minded', the partially sighted and the partially deaf. Pritchard has described how the three reports of the inter-war period provided 'the inspiration' for the changes which were to take place in special education after 1944.²⁹ They had called for special schools to be brought into the general educational framework,

with the *Report* on the education of the Partially Sighted calling for specialist provision away from those needing education by 'blind methods'.³⁰ There was concern relating to the issues highlighted in Chapter Six; it was felt that partially sighted students in schools for the blind were not being prepared for the 'sighted world'. The Report was also critical of the fact that an estimated 3,200 partially sighted children were not receiving any form of special education.³¹ The recommendation was that some of the schools for the blind should change to provide specific provision for the partially sighted instead.³² However, the financial constraints created by the Great Depression meant that no reforms had followed.

By 1939, Lumsden of the Board may have felt that the number of vacancies had created a 'scandal of a situation' so that a 'big stick' was required, but other officials felt they lacked the power to act.³³ They were worried about the opposition of 'vested interests', as well as legal problems with trust deeds and endowments. The Government was unwilling to alienate local communities with strong links to their local special school and LEAs were reluctant to bear the additional expense of sending children to residential schools if separate provision ended the situation where local schools provided for partially sighted and blind students together.³⁴ In an attempt to encourage co-operation, the Board did set up regional meetings but reactions to the proposals demonstrated the pride centred on local schools. Officials in Preston opposed any closure.³⁵ Henshaw's School in Manchester was accused by Eagar of not exhibiting the 'spirit of scientific detachment' essential for the rationalisation the Secretary-General felt necessary while he was trying to increase the NIB's role in provision in the North.³⁶

The declaration of war led to the abandonment of the schemes, but the discussions do demonstrate that there was a demand for change before the war created its own call for general educational reform. The lack of action meant that the status of Worcester and Chorleywood as the only secondary schools for the blind had been left unaffected, but they would become involved when discussions resumed once the invasion threat had receded.

7.2 The Impact of War

The 'set of contradictory processes, events and values' Armstrong has identified in the history of the disabled was evident in the impact of war on the lives and education of the blind.³⁷ The development of special schools and new fields of work and welfare, when it had happened, had been gradual, but, even more than was shown in Chapter Two to have been the case after 1914-8, war was to provide some positive consequences for the disabled. Within the forces and on the radio there was a heightened sense of debate on social conditions as public opinion grew to be in favour of reform and extensive change.³⁸ However, as Gosden has demonstrated, this pressure for removing some social inequalities during a 'Total' war was accompanied by an overwhelming need for national unity; the survival of the coalition government under a Conservative leader resulted in attempts to avoid 'deeply divisive and controversial issues'.³⁹ Educational and social reform which opened up equality of opportunity to all disabled groups was too radical to be achievable under these conditions, but war highlighted a need for social reform which did have an impact on schooling for the blind.

The shared experience of 'total' war created a feeling that everybody who had contributed should have the same chances in life.⁴⁰ The experience of evacuation had meant that some of the problems of deprivation in the inner cities had become evident to host families in the

countryside.⁴¹ In addition, many special schools were destroyed, or unable to evacuate, with the result that more 'disabled' children found their way into mainstream schools which highlighted for members of the public and policy-makers some of their additional academic and social needs.⁴²

Although one bomb was to fall on fields next to the College, Chorleywood was far enough away from London and had the advantage of extensive cellars which could be used as dormitories in an air-raid, so that, like Worcester, they did not have to evacuate, but there were difficulties for many schools for the blind and this brought reorganisation back onto the political agenda.⁴³ The Birmingham Royal Institute schools were better off than many. With their Carpenter Road premises requisitioned for military purposes, girls went to Bockleton Court, while boys were evacuated to Worcester College for a year, before moving to Kinlet Hall.⁴⁴ The Royal Normal College (RNC) at Upper Norwood initially sent most of its students to the London Society's Swiss Cottage, which prompted the Board to encourage the existing merger negotiations between the two organisations. The officials were powerless to prevent the scheme foundering when the RNC governors stipulated how their substantial funds could be utilised.⁴⁵ RNC then evacuated to Rowton Castle in Shropshire (where they remained after the war). The kindergarten section was sent to the BRIB, and this promoted further discussion around their future, with inevitable implications for other schools. As will be developed in the next section, RNC, and the NIB, were approached by the Board with plans to make the former a secondary technical school, losing its younger students, but also, to the advantage of Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges, no longer offering School Certificate.⁴⁶

The momentum for change in the education of disabled children was assisted by the impact which war production had on attitudes towards the capabilities of disabled workers. With thirty-seven per cent of the working population in the forces or munitions factories by the middle of 1941, there were vacancies which provided disabled people with new possibilities. Between July 1941 and December 1945, 310,806 disabled people were placed directly in employment or in training which enabled them to get work.⁴⁷ Gordon and Humphries have stressed the significance of war in providing opportunities for career advancement which had not been available before and the experience of Worcester and Chorleywood students, described in Chapters Four and Six, supports this view.⁴⁸

The economic importance of the disabled workforce to the war effort was evident in the positive images presented in Government training films and exhibitions, as well as items from newsreel companies.⁴⁹ The NIB were keen to show how the blind were 'doing their bit' with their Report for 1943-44 including photographs of blind war workers die threading at the De Havilland Aircraft Company and operating a vertical jig drill. The organisation saw the promotional opportunity this presented for future employment prospects, asserting that '[m]any testimonials show that the blind worker can reach at least 100% output, does not take longer to train than a sighted worker, and is not prone to accidents'.⁵⁰

The Government was making efforts to help disabled servicemen and women. Bevin, the Minister of Labour, urged employers to give work to wounded ex-servicemen, 'as an "honour" that you are returning something to the men who have made a sacrifice on our behalf'.⁵¹ Such initiatives were also to assist other disabled people, including the blind. The findings of Tomlinson's Inter-Departmental Committee on the Rehabilitation and

Resettlement of Disabled Persons were welcomed by the NIB as promoting the need to 'assert employment as the most constructive form of welfare for problems of blindness'.⁵² The Report opened with sentiments which would not be unfamiliar to writers such as Oliver promoting the Social Model of Disability:

The successful rehabilitation of a person disabled by injury or sickness is not solely a medical problem.... Ordinary employment is the object and is practicable for the majority of the disabled with the goodwill and co-operation of the representative organisations of employers and work people, in conjunction with the Health Service and the responsible Government Departments.⁵³

The result was the Disabled Persons Act of 1944, which forced employers to employ a prescribed quota of rehabilitated workers and helped to establish a principle that the 'majority of disabled people are fully employable on their own merits in competition with non-disabled workers, providing that prejudice and discrimination are overcome'.⁵⁴

After the war the new Labour Government went further in taking an interest in employment opportunities for the blind. A Working Party, appointed 'to investigate the facilities existing for the employment of blind persons in industry and in public and other services, and to make recommendations for their development', reported in 1950.⁵⁵ The NIB perceived an increased willingness amongst employers to take on blind employees, as 'it is no longer regarded as a sacrifice of economic principles on the altar of philanthropy'.⁵⁶ However, most of these opportunities were in light industry; the problem for the secondary schools was in enabling pupils to acquire jobs which provided longer term prospects.

The schools were hindered by the survival of some pre-war attitudes, even amongst Government officials. Bosworth Smith, Principal Assistant Secretary in the Medical Branch, failed to appreciate the value of the self-confidence gained from working on equal terms and for higher wages: he expressed his belief that it was to the 'benefit of the blind man to learn a skilled craft and to be employed in workshops or in his own home rather than to be employed in sighted industry on processes which meant nothing more than continuous repetition'. He thought the man would be happier doing skilled work 'even if the repetitive work brought in better wages.'⁵⁷

As will be developed in Chapter Ten, women with a disability faced additional problems at the end of the war. Harris's interviews with sighted women war workers who had gone into traditionally male areas found that their help was only regarded as 'temporary'.⁵⁸ When the war ended, many women were laid off or effectively demoted out of, what were seen as inappropriate, supervisory roles. A million women left their jobs by the summer of 1946.⁵⁹ Many of these women did leave their work voluntarily and this was a response in line with traditional perceptions of their place in the home; a view that Government propaganda on the importance of the female domestic role sought to encourage.⁶⁰ This would mean that the blind girls of Chorleywood faced a double obstacle again to finding suitable employment.

Therefore, although the war did improve some opportunities, many of the gains were only temporary. Once the servicemen were demobilised, the disabled were once again in a vulnerable position, and the new quotas would not necessarily assist the blind. As will be shown in the following chapters, the schools had to bear this in mind when preparing their

students for taking a role in society. Education remained as crucial as ever, and the 1944 Act was to confirm opportunities for some young people, but reaffirm some of the class-based restrictions for others.

7.3 Implementing the Tripartite System in Special Education

Some contemporary radicals did consider the 1944 Education Act to be 'a revolutionary' measure.⁶¹ Secondary education was made freely available to all 'educable' children, and not just those who could pay, or could gain the scholarships, as had been essential before the war. There was a desire for change created by war with an awareness that the post-war world would require a better educated workforce. The elementary schools were to disappear so that a higher standard of basic education would be provided. For the first time groups of the disabled were included directly in, and even created by, the provisions of the Act, with the new Minister for Education empowered under Section 33 to make regulations defining categories and educational treatment and the provision of means.⁶² Educationalists working with the blind responded positively to opportunities they considered would 'lift special schools on to a higher plane'; although they were probably only thinking in terms of the situation for institutions serving children with sensory impairments.⁶³ They saw themselves as bearing a large responsibility: 'Great developments are possible; it is for us to achieve them.'⁶⁴ Eight years later, the headmaster of the Brighton School was to claim that for all schools the aim was no longer just one of 'care' but of providing 'the fullest facilities for his physical, mental, social and spiritual development'.⁶⁵ In contrast, Borsay and Tomlinson have portrayed the Act as formalizing the class divisions of the era and this raises questions as to whether Worcester and Chorleywood were presenting opportunities which were available to all.⁶⁶ An examination

of developments does show that attitudes in the Ministry had been modified for children with sensory impairments, if not for other disabled groups, but again some of the problems for blind pupils were a consequence of conflicts between the views of society, educationalists and officials.

The Butler Act followed Cyril Norwood's suggested division of students and stipulated the provision of academic, technical and general education, according to the 'three A's' of 'age, aptitude and ability', but it did not specify the types of secondary school to be created.⁶⁷ The new Ministry, and Ellen Wilkinson who became the Minister for Attlee's Labour Government elected in 1945, encouraged the setting up of a 'tripartite system' in order 'to meet the differing needs of different pupils'.⁶⁸ The pre-war secondary schools were to continue as grammar schools which were to cater for the academically able, with technical schools available for those with the skills needed by industry. All other children were to go to the secondary moderns where the aim was to provide a 'general training more suitable for the majority of pupils', although the buildings, staffing and amenities tended not to be comparable to those provided in grammar schools, confirming the impression of parents that the education was inferior.⁶⁹ Even John Newsom, the County Education Officer for Hertfordshire who promoted innovative teaching in the secondary moderns under his authority, acknowledged that 'admission ... was a confession of failure ... and precluded entry to specific high-status occupations'.⁷⁰ Historians examining mainstream education have been critical of the manner in which opportunities remained restricted. Lowe has described how the Act set up a 'divided system of education', as a result of 'an essentially conservative reaction to the traumas of wartime'.⁷¹ Even the more sympathetic Barber has looked at the social elitism which remained in society and admits that 'it [the Act] did little to challenge the inadequacies of the prevailing culture'.⁷²

When the demand for reform created by war led to the White Paper entitled *Educational Reconstruction*, reference to 'handicapped children' was cursory, with a simple admission that there would be a need for 'substantial modification' in provision.⁷³ However, the Ministry was going to ensure that the tripartite structure was reflected in the designation of the schools for the blind and deaf. Government and Education Authorities showed no desire to exclude blind young people from some of the perceived advantages of a grammar school education, and here Hall's 'pecking order' of disability again becomes evident as children with sensory impairments were being given advantages which were unavailable for other disabled groups.⁷⁴ Chorleywood and Worcester were to provide a grammar school education, with RNC confirmed as the Technical College, and the elementary schools becoming secondary moderns.⁷⁵ Outside the new tripartite structure in mainstream education, a small but significant private sector remained, but, for the NIB, the experience of the inter-war years had shown that the schools needed State support. The schools would remain under the control of a charity, but as non-maintained special schools would qualify for State funding.

The Government decision to create this structure came out of negotiations which had taken place during the war years. The proposed wartime reorganisation of RNC to provide a 'higher type of vocational education' opened up discussions which brought to the surface many of the tensions between the different organisations. The Board found itself at the centre of the rivalries by holding an initial meeting at Worcester with representatives of RNC and the NIB. This led to accusations that there was a 'favoured class' in the education of the blind, who had been consulted whilst the others, including the CTB, had been ignored.⁷⁶ However, there was an awareness in the CTB that the treatment of bright

children was still 'haphazard' with a need for more equality of opportunity for all children.⁷⁷ The Board considered that approximately five per cent of students would benefit from moving on to a more selective education, although this would still put blind students at a disadvantage compared to the twenty per cent of mainstream students envisaged appropriate for grammars.⁷⁸ Part of the problem in creating a tripartite structure was getting the schools to agree to transfer students to RNC at thirteen; there was considerable opposition from the London Society and Bristol at the prospect of losing some of their brighter students. There was a fear of being left as a 'skimmed' school, without the most able, with London fearing the consequence for its advanced music. Even the BRIB, which was 'not favourable but not inimical', asserted that 'they ran classes for selected pupils who attained a good standard'.⁷⁹ The problem here was that, whatever the teachers were saying about the more able, these students were not able to do any examinations in a society where qualifications were becoming more important. Edkins, of the BRIB, may have felt that putting brighter students in the workshops raised the standards there, but this would just perpetuate their segregation, limiting their opportunities.⁸⁰

Ritchie of the London Society was particularly resentful of the developments. By 1941, Board officials were openly referring to their feeling that Ritchie 'dislikes' the NIB.⁸¹ He had written on behalf of the London Society, and also at the request of the executive of the CTB, claiming that the schools and his organisation were at one in their views. Miss Elliott disagreed with this assessment on an internal Board memorandum, commenting that support for the CTB was variable through the schools, and that even one of the supporting headmasters was suspicious of the 'Ritchie faction'.⁸² This friction may not have prevented reform, but it perhaps explains why schools did not always collaborate effectively.

Ritchie and leading members of the CTB had not given up on their plans for 'complete' schools and continued the pressure for educational change by producing their own report on *Replanning*; this was published after the White Paper, but written before it, and again put forward Ritchie's key idea of fewer and larger schools.⁸³ Ritchie continued to claim that the 'world of the blind' was so 'small' as to make the application of the divisions suggested by the Hadow scheme 'inapplicable'; numbers of blind students were not sufficient to allow the development of separate schools according to 'age, aptitude and ability' in all areas.⁸⁴ With the Board already favouring the idea of continuing support for Worcester and Chorleywood as grammar schools, officials had asserted that the CTB plans were 'unworkable' as numbers were considered insufficient for six large schools.⁸⁵

The CTB report on *Replanning* also called for a better qualified and paid teaching staff as well as the compulsory notification of infantile blindness. They also proposed to establish 'occupational colonies' for 'retarded children', with the prefacing statement:

For obvious social reasons it is desirable that the majority of these cases should be segregated from the ordinary life of the community.⁸⁶

This statement, as well as the practicality of forcing parents to notify, was not left unchallenged as the editor of NIB's *New Beacon* felt that:

For obvious personal reasons, it is desirable that the majority of these cases should not be segregated from the ordinary life of the community.⁸⁷

The NIB was still looking to establish a new school for pupils with multiple disabilities; a goal realised when they opened Condoover Hall in 1948. However, the statement does reflect the difficulties experienced by those with additional impairments when pressures were created to promote alterations in provision.⁸⁸

The new Ministry of Education's requirement that schools for the blind should be residential, as well as their unwillingness to allow all-age schools to continue, particularly if they had fewer than five classes, brought up the issue of a rationalisation of provision again. Chorleywood had to lose its boys and its preparatory section, but other schools throughout the country could also be affected. Officials were willing to use their increased powers to ensure effective execution of national policy and put pressure on the schools with the aim of achieving some of the proposals promoted before the war.

Regional Conferences of Special Schools were held again in 1945 and 1947, leading to reorganisation in the Midlands and North.⁸⁹ In the Midlands, the BRIB's Lickey Grange School was to take blind children from eleven Midland Counties, with the result that sixteen children between the ages of eight and fifteen transferred when the school in Stoke closed in 1949.⁹⁰ Efforts were made in the north to create a rationalised structure based on the Hadow system. The schools in Sheffield and Newcastle became junior schools and York and Henshaw's became secondary moderns in the North.

Inconsistencies in the application of policy across the country did create some opposition to the proposals in the north. Henshaw's had been reluctant to give up some of their students when they discovered that all-age schools were being allowed in the Midlands and the South. The Minister did have the power to allow special schools to keep primary and secondary age pupils.⁹¹ In the post-war years, the BRIB was allowed to move its secondary students to the site at Lickey Grange occupied by its primary section, but only after new buildings were available to house the older students. In the south, all the schools continued in the same form. The London Society was allowed to establish a new school at Seal in Kent in 1954 (which continued with the name of Dorton House), and Bristol kept its primary and secondary sections.

The maintenance of the status quo in the south was a result of the lobbying of powerful interest groups. Ritchie's London Society school (which had moved to Dorton House in Buckinghamshire) was going to have to relocate but he still attempted to push forward his view of suitable developments.⁹² The Education officer of the London County Council (LCC) complained that he had heard that matters had already been sorted and he felt that the LCC's own school at Linden Lodge was being ignored.⁹³ Attempts were made by Ritchie to bring the LCC into his schemes, which included the absorption of the two Brighton schools, but the local officials wanted to keep control of their students, and therefore the existing schools continued.⁹⁴

Outside the capital, there were changes as a result of new regulations which required separate provision for the partially sighted. The Midland LEAs decided to create a school for the partially sighted at Exhall Grange which opened in 1951, with a grammar school department being added in 1960.⁹⁵ When the school was suggested there was discontent

amongst the governors of Worcester College, with concern focusing on the possibility of these young people getting eye strain when at university if they did not know Braille.⁹⁶ However, in their unwillingness to allow the partially sighted to use sighted methods of work, the Worcester authorities were going against medical developments. Ophthalmologists such as Professor Ida Mann demanded the removal of the 'sight-saving' measures pressed on to the partially sighted, and this did lead to LCC provision encouraging the use of the eyes, whilst also ensuring the elimination of what they perceived as the conditions which could lead to eye-strain.⁹⁷ Such developments run counter to many of the accusations made about the influence of the medical profession in special education after 1944 as this was strengthening the call for integration, or at least separate provision.⁹⁸ By 1960, only two schools for the blind were permitted to take students categorised as partially sighted. St. Vincent's was allowed as the only Catholic school for the blind in England and Wales and Bridgend as the only special school for the visually impaired in Wales.⁹⁹

The mixed system of all-age and primary schools did create differences in opportunity, certainly as far as access to the Technical College was concerned. David Blunkett may have been able to transfer from the junior school at Sheffield to RNC (even though he found the failure to offer academic examinations as part of the curriculum restricting), but other schools were less willing to transfer their students.¹⁰⁰ Miss McHugh of Chorleywood commented over twenty years later that neither Lickey Grange School nor the London society had allowed students to move on to the Technical College at thirteen.¹⁰¹ Even transfer at eleven was not always straight-forward, with Peter White reporting that, although some staff at Bristol helped him prepare for Worcester entrance, others saw him as a 'traitor' for wanting to leave.¹⁰²

Also, the mixed system of charity and LEA schools was to create inequalities in the level of provision, with some schools backed by charities appearing to have ‘unlimited financial resources’, whilst others ‘need to watch carefully every penny’.¹⁰³ The increased role of some LEAs was to cause concern and Edward Evans MP, who had been headmaster of the East Anglian School for Blind and Deaf Children, Chairman of the CTB and briefly Deputy Secretary of the NIB, used his new position in Parliament to call for greater Ministry involvement; he highlighted the deficiencies in buildings, the waiting lists and the need for sufficient staff remuneration to fill vacancies in special schools for the blind and the deaf.¹⁰⁴

Government action in stipulating that provision for blind children had to be in residential special schools did affect the role of parents. The Act required that LEAs should ensure that school provision was in accordance with parental wishes, but this was balanced with a proviso that there should not be unreasonable public expenditure.¹⁰⁵ The assumption was that the children would often be better off in a boarding school away from their parents. Such a feeling was evident in the reluctance of schools for the blind such as Lickey Grange to let the children go home in the middle of terms, and even Worcester College allowed parents only one visit a term.¹⁰⁶

The application of the tripartite system to the education of blind children did result in alterations in the structure of provision, but the role of independent charities meant that substantial change in some areas was difficult and many of the old schools were to continue, if in a slightly modified form. The education provided even for this one group of ‘disabled’ children was far from uniform. However, in attempting to understand some of

the weaknesses of the provision, the limitations of the underlying assumptions behind the 1944 Act have to be considered.

7.4 The Limits of Meritocracy

Although the post-war age was one in which the term 'Meritocracy' was coined as an ironic reflection on the dangers of the tripartite system creating a society based on a 'career open to talents', the opportunities for many children were limited and were to be dictated by the placement made as a result of testing at eleven.¹⁰⁷ Anthony Howard has described the 1944 Education Act as 'the greatest restoration of traditional social values since 1660' and this perception that the old attitudes were perpetuated has been a theme of other sociologists, educationalists and historians.¹⁰⁸ Writing in the 1950s, Halsey, Floud and Martin were to claim that, 'The likelihood that a working class boy will reach a grammar school is not notably greater today, despite all the changes, than it was before 1945.'¹⁰⁹ In fact, Blackburn and Marsh's research has suggested that, although the proportion of children from the lower classes selected had initially risen whilst those from the upper classes had fallen, this trend was reversed as the 'baby boom' generation reached secondary education.¹¹⁰ There was no great desire to extend the numbers gaining the opportunity provided by an academic education, and this appears to have been linked to many of the class-based assumptions shown in the earlier chapters. For many blind children attendance at a secondary modern special school did reduce any chance they may have had to advance themselves into the professions, but this was just as was the case for their sighted peers. For the students of Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges gaining access to a grammar school education was giving them access to opportunities still reserved for an elite.

Ministerial policy was to limit the intake of the grammar schools in order to prevent the labour market being overwhelmed with people qualified for higher level employment; there were fears that this would create disappointed expectations and social instability.¹¹¹ The change from School and Higher Certificate to General Certificate of Education Ordinary ('O') and Advanced ('A') Level examinations in 1951 reasserted the difference which gaining a grammar education would make to chances of gaining professional employment. Accessibility for all pupils was in some ways improved, as it was a subject examination with certification in each subject (rather than requiring passes across groups of subjects), but the standard of a pass was raised to limit the number achieving the qualification; the pass was set at the standard of the credit level at School Certificate.

Initially students taking 'O' Level examinations had to be at least sixteen. This was designed to stop entries from the secondary moderns whose students, even after the raising of the school leaving age, left at fifteen. For Simon the aim of the regulations for the new examination was deliberate, as, 'By erecting this barrier in this manner...the government perpetuated in a new form the old separation between elementary and secondary schools. The divided structure of the pre-1944 Act situation was now to persist, if in a new form.'¹¹² Such a requirement did inconvenience many of the grammar school pupils who were younger in the academic year, including two of the former students interviewed, and as a result it was removed but the intention had been clear.¹¹³

The justification underlying the separation of pupils for their secondary education was the introduction of general intelligence tests, which were based on the idea of predictive intelligence and were supposed to ensure that students found themselves receiving the correct type of education. During the inter-war years there had been an increased emphasis

upon incorporating the new scientific approach to education. Gillian Sutherland has assessed the manner in which mental measurement was developed as a result of a desire to identify and care for 'mentally handicapped children', but had then been used to develop selective examinations.¹¹⁴ Sir Cyril Burt, one of the creators of the English intelligence test, claimed that such tests were based on 'sheer efficient thinking, regardless of acquired skill, knowledge, or experience'.¹¹⁵ An ardent eugenicist, he perceived intellectual differences as 'innate' and genetically determined.¹¹⁶ The Hadow Report had therefore recommended that an eleven plus written and oral examination should be held to enable effective transfer to secondary schooling.¹¹⁷ However, Sutherland has recognised that in the years up to 1940 the interest in 'general intelligence' had little impact on the practices of selection.¹¹⁸ As was also the case at Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges, secondary schools used interviews and oral examinations, so that, for 'English educationalists....notions of ability and talent had social and cultural as well as more narrowly intellectual dimensions'.¹¹⁹

After the 1944 Education Act the eleven plus examination was supposed to be fair and allow students who would benefit from an 'academic' education to be selected, but, as Blackburn and Marsh have shown, the criteria used 'varied over time according to the availability of places'.¹²⁰ By 1956, eighty-eight per cent of LEAs were using standardized intelligence tests, with seventy-three per cent using standardized tests in English and Arithmetic.¹²¹ Social factors persisted and not only in the cultural bias of tests whose results were dependent on 'linguistic sophistication' and could be affected by early educational experience and social background.¹²² Even Burt did not assert that an assessment of intelligence should be the simple basis for selection as he felt that suitability for a grammar school education also required 'an aptitude for academic work and with a

certain minimum of educational attainments, well above those of the ordinary pupil at that age'.¹²³ For this reason he considered that tests of English and Arithmetic must be included in the examination, and felt it was acceptable for perhaps eight per cent who were just as 'bright as some of the twenty-five per cent who have been lucky enough to scrape through into the grammar school' to miss out; the 'disappointed parents ought rather to rejoice: in all probability the child thus rejected would have had an anxious struggle to come up to the standard demanded ... and in the end would have joined the crowd of weaker pupils who fail to stay the course and leave the grammar school at the earliest possible moment'.¹²⁴

While looking at the impact of the Act on children with 'disabilities', Borsay has highlighted the manner in which the new eleven-plus tests were 'methodologically flawed and indifferent to social background' and so were 'skewed in favour of the middle class'.¹²⁵ Blind and partially sighted children did struggle with the written and visual nature of the tests. Students such as Anne were also hindered by the accompanying refusal to provide additional time. Despite being sent to an independent primary school to help her pass, Anne failed the test twice and was offered a place in a school for the partially sighted. The local authority claimed they were powerless to provide any other placement, and it was only after her father wrote a letter to the Minister of Education that the eleven-plus was completed as an oral examination, leading to a successful interview at Chorleywood.¹²⁶

Other personal anecdotes have also demonstrated the importance of suitably-informed parents in ensuring that children were put forward for consideration for the grammar schools for the blind and then intervening if there were difficulties.¹²⁷ The initial selection for Worcester and Chorleywood was to be based on an assessment of broad ability rather

than through general intelligence testing. Chapters Eight and Ten demonstrate the extent to which this form of assessment did open up some opportunities to a broader social range of students when there was a narrower range of feeder schools. However, pupils did need to be nominated, and, as a consequence, for David Blunkett staff judgement meant that he did not take the Worcester entrance examination.¹²⁸ Anecdotal evidence, supported by the records of fewer students gaining admission to the grammar schools from the BRIB than from other special schools, such as Dorton House, Sheffield and Wavertree, would suggest that parental intervention was also critical if a child was to be given the opportunity.¹²⁹ Inappropriate educational support up to the age of eight, and then psychological issues linked to having to accept the need to work in Braille, led to Alan, a boy with 'useful sight', having problems reading and not being allowed to sit the assessment by Dorton.¹³⁰ The LCC's Linden Lodge made their own selection through teacher judgement at around the age of eight, creating a special class whose pupils were to be prepared for entrance to Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges.¹³¹ Any such assessment at such a young age will necessarily be affected by early experiences which could put the children of the middle classes at an advantage.

Methods used by schools and LEAs differed because assessing the intelligence of blind children was perceived as problematic. Educationalists had felt the pressure during the inter-war period to validate the comparative potential of their charges. In Britain, there had been an attempt by the CTB, with the help of Frank Earle, to carry out an investigation into the 'mental life of blind children' in 1927.¹³² Earle's transfer to Scotland ended this work, but there remained a feeling that a teacher's assessment was too 'empirical' so that there was a 'need' to use intelligence testing if the education provided for blind children was going to have any form of scientific credibility and thereby status.¹³³ They sought to

assess, 'Was it possible by modern methods of testing and analysis to discover in what way and to what extent the mind of a blind child had been affected by his handicap?' There was a concern to discover whether it was the knowledge of a blind child which was restricted as a result of lack of mental stimulation, or whether it was limited general intelligence.¹³⁴

A further attempt was made in the early 1930s by the Joint Committee of the NIB and CTB. After examining nine months of research by a psychologist, the Committee reached the conclusion that there was no way of making generalisations.¹³⁵ The focus then changed from research to surveying the state of education for the blind. They were hindered by the problems of finding a suitable test when the ability to read Braille does not necessarily correlate with intelligence, and an understanding of objects can depend on whether the student has ever had any sight.¹³⁶ As the need to legitimate the selection of students appeared to grow, schools came up with their own solutions. After 1945 some schools started using the American Hayes-Binet Test and attempts were made to prepare an adapted version of this assessment for use in Britain.¹³⁷ The designation of Worcester and Chorleywood as grammar schools made the validity of such measures more important. As will be discussed in Chapter Eight, when Bradnack became headmaster of Worcester College, he pushed for a more effective entrance examination, although it remained based on skills in English and Mathematics.

Despite the continuing difficulties of making a reliable assessment, the dominant figures behind Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges in the immediate aftermath of the Education Act made their own assumptions on intelligence, and these reveal the continued role of class-based thinking. Theodore Tylor, as Chairman of the Worcester governors, asserted a

belief that a selection panel consisting of a psychiatrist, a psychotherapist and an education psychologist, with a member of the Ministry's medical branch, would be able to make a 'judicious' choice of students at the age of seven 'with 80% accuracy'.¹³⁸ The claim was prompted by the closure of Chorleywood's preparatory department. With the NIB no longer providing primary education for blind children, Eagar and the schools' Governors became keen to establish a preparatory section at Whittington Hall, a building purchased adjacent to the Worcester College site.¹³⁹ The proposal was to establish an 'experimental school' where blind children could be educated to a 'standard comparable to that reached by the sighted at an entrance day school'.¹⁴⁰ The class social and cultural prejudice was evident when Eagar, the former public schoolboy, told Bosworth Smith of the Ministry in 1945 that the former elementary schools for the blind which were to provide primary education were not providing the 'humaner' [sic] education they could offer.¹⁴¹ In a later meeting, Eagar mentioned 'adverse reports' he had heard of the school in Sheffield, and stated that 'the existence of such a place strengthened his argument' for a new school which would serve the blind children of parents 'who refused to have anything but the best education available'.¹⁴² Tylor was to argue that the other schools were adopting 'old-fashioned methods', with criticisms made of the quality of the teaching staff who were prepared to have taken 'rather a blind alley'.¹⁴³ Eagar's view of 'humaner' was still linked to the early century views of avoiding 'social contamination' with a preparatory department necessary 'to provide the more socially selected group desired by some parents'.¹⁴⁴

Ministry reactions to the NIB's proposal do illustrate how far the NIB leadership, as well as the Worcester and Chorleywood Governors, were out of step with changes that had taken place in attitudes in the post-war world. Eagar and Tylor were going in the face of much of the ethos underlying the 1944 Act, and were making assumptions which a Labour Ministry

could not accept. Officials were aware of the difficulty of making a scientific judgement on a pupil's potential at eleven, and had pushed during the war for the possibility of transfers at thirteen.¹⁴⁵ Bosworth Smith and HMI Lumsden argued that it was 'absurd' to claim that the potential of children could be assessed at seven.¹⁴⁶ Bosworth Smith was also concerned at the further damage which the proposed school would cause to the still 'none too friendly' relations between the NIB and the CTB, and his opposition was supported by the Ministry of Education Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children who considered that they 'could not recommend the approval of a school with a social basis of selection, and it was difficult to know how such a factor could be excluded entirely from this proposal'.¹⁴⁷ The existing preparatory schools for the sighted were fee paying and selective socially as a consequence, and they felt that students who went to the new school would be at an advantage which could lead to the exclusion from the grammar schools for the blind of 'children of equal or greater ability in the ordinary special schools'.¹⁴⁸ There was an admission that standards of education needed to improve in the existing schools, but it would be the Ministry's role to 'try and inform the existing blind schools' rather than support the establishment of a new selective primary school.¹⁴⁹

After the refusal of funding, a delegation led by Lord Cobham, including Eagar, Edward Evans MP, and Mrs Wheelwright of Chorleywood College, went to the Ministry but with no more success.¹⁵⁰ There had been a plan for a private school, but problems in funding the two secondary schools in the thirties, and perhaps concern over the impact that having a privately funded preparatory school might have on bringing in students at eleven to Chorleywood and Worcester College, meant that there were no further options; the role of the State was to be critical in the post-war world.

Despite the class-biased nature of some of the selection processes which were being used with visually impaired children, the Butler Education Act was enabling a funded secondary education to be present which could extend opportunities to a broader range of students. The schools would have to alter in some ways as they became grammar schools, but their pupils will be shown in the next few chapters to have benefited from this, as well as some of the other changes which occurred in post-war Britain.

7.5 The position of blind children in Post-War Society

The Second World War did not only result in legislation relating to education, but also prompted other developments which had an impact on the schools and prospects for blind people. The desire for the State to increase its involvement and solve the problems identified by war resulted in popular pressure for the adoption of the Beveridge Report.¹⁵¹ The election of a Labour Government in an electoral landslide in 1945 was to lead to the 'Welfare State' and the creation of the National Health Service. For Tomlinson, this led to an increasing medicalisation of special education, with an increase in psychological, medical and welfare professionals who had a vested interest in maintaining and expanding provision.¹⁵² However, as far as the education of blind children was concerned these changes do need to be seen as far more complex, with both positive and negative consequences.

Medical changes did help to reduce some of the stigma of disability for blind people, removing some of the association with disease and the working classes. Ironically, increased healthcare provision itself brought an increase in sight loss. By the 1950s, the greatest cause of visual impairment in children was Retrolental Fibroplasia (now known as Retinopathy of Prematurity). The increased medical intervention possible with premature

babies had caused problems as a result of a lack of understanding of the damage which could be caused to the retina by the giving of oxygen in unlimited amounts.¹⁵³ The number of blind children under one had increased from twelve in 1931 to twenty-eight in 1951.¹⁵⁴ In 1953, eighty-four of the 164 children in the Sunshine Homes had Retrolental Fibroplasia.¹⁵⁵

The position of blind people in British society was assisted by the discrediting of negative eugenics which resulted from the revelations about the Nazi regime's 'euthanasia' and sterilisation policies.¹⁵⁶ Most of the open questioning of the right to life of some 'disabled' groups ended, although the British Eugenics Society continued and hereditarian principles maintained their influence in Psychology and Psychiatry.¹⁵⁷ The legacy in England was most evident in the linked discipline of genetic study to search for hereditary mechanisms. Some schools did encourage students to consider genetic counselling, even though this cannot have been readily available as access to guidance for parents and older students was to be a recommendation of the Vernon Committee which first met to report on the education of the 'Visually Handicapped' in 1968.¹⁵⁸ There were also legacies in the continuation of defensive thinking amongst some of the staff, as will be shown in Chapter Nine, with Bradnack asserting the ability of the boys to become 'useful citizens'.

Other developments in psychology and the social sciences which placed more emphasis on environmental factors had implications for the schools for the blind. From the publication in 1933 of Cutsforth's book, discussed in Chapter Two, there had been a growing pressure for an end to the institutionalisation of blind children.¹⁵⁹ His call for schools to enable 'mental and social comfort' with the outside world was seen as beginning the age of psychologists and inspectors entering the field.¹⁶⁰ On the twentieth anniversary of

publication, there were criticisms from Miller of the Bristol School, but an admission that as a consequence there had been a 're-shaping' of Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges; a consideration which will be assessed in chapters Nine and Ten.¹⁶¹

Such writings undermined the complacency which had been evident in the NIB/CTB Report of the 1930s.¹⁶² Special schools for the blind faced increased expectations from LEAs and parents. The need to demonstrate a more scientific approach led the CTB to set up a research council in 1951 in an attempt to initiate and co-ordinate research on the education and welfare of blind children.¹⁶³ The Council's Secretary was Myfanwy Williams, a Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham and a former teacher with the BRIB, who was visiting Worcester, Chorleywood and other schools for the blind in order to develop an 'Intelligence Test for Blind Children'.¹⁶⁴ In 1956, Williams published an oral assessment which could be applied to individuals and was based on existing tests already standardised on sighted children.¹⁶⁵ Members of the CTB Research Committee, which included the headteachers of Worcester and Chorleywood, also worked on assessing levels of work in mathematics and reading, as well as examining 'blind mannerisms' such as 'eye-poking'.¹⁶⁶ This was then followed, in 1956, by Bronislaw Gomulicki researching the learning processes of blind children as part of a joint project between the RNIB and the Cambridge Institute of Education.¹⁶⁷

There was medicalisation of special education for the blind to the extent that the medical definition of 'blindness' decreed that the students should be separated out into residential education but, in these schools, the success of pre-war pupils of Worcester and Chorleywood had helped to ensure that teaching should dominate and this was not the case with some other 'disabled' groups undoubtedly still lower down the 'pecking order'. The

independent member of Parliament for London University, the dermatologist and self-styled 'member for education', Sir Ernest Graham-Little, summed up the position when he queried a statement from Edward Evans, who seems to have become the 'member for special education':

While he was speaking about aphasic and spastic disorders in a special school, I felt that that was surely a matter for the medical profession rather than for educationists. ... my right hon. Friend is wasting time in trying to do something by educational methods when it is the medical aspect which should receive attention.¹⁶⁸

Where most educators of blind children were slower was in promoting the skills which could be used in adult life for independent living and travel. During the Second World War, an American army sergeant, Richard Hoover, had developed techniques using a long cane with blinded American veterans. Mobility training was only to start in Great Britain in the mid-1960s, and then only after some official hostility. Some of the opposition came from schools for the blind such as Sheffield. The Hoover system was felt to be untried with the congenitally blind, and was criticised for being too rigid a technique with the cane representing a danger to sighted people.¹⁶⁹ Worcester and Chorleywood students were involved in research that was completed by members of the CTB in the 1950s, but this was linked to gaining an understanding of the role played by sound in the perception of obstacles and was an attempt to explain, with a view to eventually developing, the traditional methods used by blind people.¹⁷⁰

The increased role of the State in welfare was to have more of an immediate effect on the experience of blind people when they entered adult life. The old poor law had terminated, and local authorities were encouraged to develop the 'promotional welfare' set up by the 1920 Blind Persons' Act.¹⁷¹ There was more financial security, and, as the Chairman of the CTB, Dr. Langdon of the RNC, pointed out, what was formerly gained from charity was now 'enjoyed by right'.¹⁷² Although there were undoubtedly weaknesses in provision, for education there were some repercussions.¹⁷³ Some of the local charities no longer provided home visitors, and were able to concentrate solely on their school.¹⁷⁴

There was some slight increase in work opportunities in the new welfare services. Some blind people were able to become 'home teachers', working to support blind adults in their residences. The Ministry of Health may have encouraged the employment of the disabled in this role, but this did not prevent some local authorities restricting applications to the sighted.¹⁷⁵ Also, the Minister did not feel that he could issue a directive which would ensure that registered blind persons served on the welfare committees relating to the blind.¹⁷⁶ As a result, blind adults were often left in the passive role of recipients, rather than being able to assert their own needs.

In fact, the new age did lead to some reservations that too much help was being provided. At a Midland Branch meeting of the CTB, John Lorimer, a BRIB teacher who was blind, expressed his concern that pupils were being 'feather-bedded' and that they needed to realise that 'life contained many obstacles which needed to be surmounted'.¹⁷⁷ He felt that members of services needed to remember that the key to the 'development of true citizenship and self-respect' was not "What can society do for the Blind?" but "What can the Blind do for society?".¹⁷⁸ The response was a condemnation of such 'absurdly

reactionary' views, but on the grounds that such comforts were not amiss given 'the vista' for the average blind child was a 'rather drab future'.¹⁷⁹ Lorimer answered the criticism by sounding a 'warning note' that 'young blind people might become too readily content to accept the prop and shelter of the welfare services rather than face an attempt to achieve full and independent lives for themselves'.¹⁸⁰ The following chapters show the grammar schools maintaining their aim of creating expectations in confident students who could be capable of asserting themselves to play an active role in society.

The formalization of State welfare provision which worried some educationalists was accompanied by a professionalization of charity provision which was to make the conflicts between the different interests less personal. Society was still class and status conscious, but this was becoming less dictated by birth. At the end of 1949, W. McG Eagar retired. *The Times* devoted a leader to the event, claiming that 'It is due to him more than anyone else that blindness has come to be regarded in this country as a handicap to be conquered rather than an affliction to be mitigated.'¹⁸¹ They considered that he had avoided a 'sentimental' view, feeling that blind people must 'be encouraged to overcome their handicap and take their places amongst the workers of the world.'¹⁸² However, as was evident in his promotion of the Worcester preparatory school, he had increasingly appeared out of touch with the post-War world. When John Colligan took over as Secretary-General of the NIB, he was reported as saying that Eagar should have retired five years earlier.¹⁸³ An examination of Colligan's background illustrates how society had altered; rather than having Eagar's elite connections, Colligan had left his local high school at sixteen and gone into commerce, before becoming Liverpool Branch Secretary for the NIB.¹⁸⁴ The dominance of the traditional ruling class in the charity was further weakened when, in 1953, the now Royal National Institute for the Blind appointed Michael Colborne-Brown

as their new Education Officer; he had been Deputy Educational Officer of Hertfordshire. The personal tensions which had existed were further reduced when Ritchie, who had remained as Honorary Superintendent after giving up his daily work as Superintendent of the London Society in 1944, retired in 1950.

Professionalism was needed to negotiate the altered charity role when the creation of the Welfare State provided some assistance and security for blind people. However, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, for the students of Worcester and Chorleywood security and 'white-collar' status, and not just subsistence, were to be promoted as the goals.

7.6 Summary - Moving Forward

The study of the developments in schools for the blind after the 1944 Education Act again demonstrates that the factors which affected special education for the disabled were more complex than writers such as Pritchard, Cole and Tomlinson have suggested.¹⁸⁵ During this period, humanitarian progress was not the primary factor influencing developments, but equally changed attitudes towards disability and vested interests were working in a far more complex manner than has been suggested by revisionist writers such as Tomlinson.

The 'strategic power-play' suggested by Tomlinson as existing between medical and educational interests in the inter-war years, and examined in Part One, can be seen more obviously in the manoeuvring of the schools' supervising authorities.¹⁸⁶ The machinations of Ritchie, Purse and Eagar in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and then the disagreement with the LCC in 1945, suggest considerable rivalries and tensions. A study of blind

children as one 'disabled' group would appear to indicate that the impact of the 1944 Butler Act created several models of special education.

The Act confirmed the right of blind children to gain a free academic secondary education and the qualifications necessary to advance on to professional occupations. Although some of the issues which prevented working class students in mainstream schools from accessing a grammar education could also work against some blind students, the nature of the assessment in the primary schools for the blind did, as will be seen, give many a chance of acquiring the currency for status in the society of Britain after the Second World War. The changes which took place under the impact of the Second World War did promote alterations in teaching and future work opportunities, but remaining perceptions of 'disability' left challenges with which Worcester and Chorleywood would have to deal if their students were to be enabled to play a full role in society.

7.7 References

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- ⁶ Cole, 99-101.
- ⁷ Tomlinson, *Expansion*, 160.
- ⁸ Borsay, *Disability*, 111.
- ⁹ Armstrong, 451. Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 51-2.
- ¹⁰ Armstrong, 443.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, 441.
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- ¹³ Sutherland, 'Origins', 99.
- ¹⁴ Hall, 20.
- ¹⁵ Phillips, 14.
- ¹⁶ NIB/CTB, *Education of the Blind. A Survey. Being the Report of the Joint Committee of the College of Teachers of the Blind and the National Institute for the Blind* (London: Edward Arnold and Co, 1936), Table 10, 270.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 10, 254 and 256. In 1937 the BRIB Carpenter Road school had 21 vacancies, Minute 351, 4/2/1937, Minute Book House and Education Committees, BRIB, MS1700/1/5/7, Birm.

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¹⁹ *Ibid.*: *The Education of the Adolescent, Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education* [Hadow Report] (London: HMSO, 1926), Chapter 11, II, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.* The London Society school was at Swiss Cottage. Ritchie laid out his plans when the reorganisation of RNC was discussed. Note of meeting HMI Lumsden with Dr. Ritchie and Mr. Ross, 24/7/1941, NA ED50/263.

²¹ Letter from Ben Purse to the President of the Board of Education, 5/11/1938: Letter from W. Eagar to K. Lindsay, 2/1/1939, ED50/262 NA. Eagar and Lindsay had spoken at a dinner. Lindsay's letter to 'Mac' suggests a long-standing acquaintance which probably dated from their 1920s involvement in social welfare in London. Eagar was involved with the Boys' Club in Southwark, whilst Lindsay was a local councillor and Poor Law Guardian in Stepney.

²² K.W. Elliott, note on memo of meeting of Purse with Board officials, 12/12/1938, ED50/262 NA.

²³ Ritchie letter to Elliott, 9/1/1939, ED50/262 NA

²⁴ Letter Eagar to Lindsay, 2/1/1939, ED50/262 NA.

²⁵ CTB/NIB, *Education*, 31-6.

²⁶ Minute 268 20/9/1932, Minute Book House and Education Committees, BRIB, MS1700/1/5/7, Birm.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 290, 15/5/1934.

²⁸ Memo from Elliott to Maxwell-Lyte, 10/11/1938, ED50/262 NA.

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³⁰ *Ibid.*, 208-9: *Report Partially Sighted* (1934), 49.

³¹ *Report, Ibid*, 49, 12.

³² Memo Elliott to Maxwell-Lyte, 10/11/1938, ED50/262 NA.

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³⁷ Armstrong, 441.

³⁸ Calder, 159-61, 289-90,

³⁹ P. Gosden, 'Putting the Act together,' *History of Education* 24 (1995): 195.

⁴⁰ Calder, 626.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 49-51.

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- ⁴⁵ Notes of visit of HMI Lumsden to RNC at Swiss Cottage, 1/2/1941, ED62/144 NA.
- ⁴⁶ Conference at WCB to discuss future of RNC, 8/7/1941, ED50/263 NA.
- ⁴⁷ Gordon and Humphries, 132.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 130-1.
- ⁴⁹ Ministry of Information Second World War Official Collection, 'Back at work Exhibition, Demonstrating the Re-employment of Disabled People, Manchester, Lancashire, England' (1944); Catalogue no. 22552, available from Imperial War Museum <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpcgi.exe> (20/8/2010): British Movietone News, 'Re-Settlement of the Disabled' (20/11/1944).
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- ¹⁰⁶ A BRIB Committee decided that it was not 'desirable' for children of five to ten years to go home at week-ends. From 1947 Junior and Senior Students were allowed home no more than three weekends per term. 17/12/1946 and 21/10/1947, Lickey Grange and Carpenter Road Schools Minute Book House and Education 7, MS1700/1/4/25 Birm: Interview David.
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¹²⁸ Blunkett, 41.

¹²⁹ WCB student files: CW GovMins: Discussions with Dot on transfers from Lickey Grange, August 2008: Judith felt that one Dorton student would not have been able to take up the offer of re-assessment the next year if it had not been for parental pressure, Email 8/7/2010.

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¹³¹ Interview, David.

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¹³⁷ 'Summary of Educational Facilities'. *The Education of Blind Youth: Proceedings of the International Conference of Educators of Blind Youth, 1952* (Boston: AFB, 1952), 216. The tests which had been developed are outlined in E. Hill, *Assessing the Visually Impaired. An Annotated Bibliography of Educational, Vocational and Psychological Tests*

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¹³⁹ The NIB 'Sunshine schools' were functioning as nursery schools.

¹⁴⁰ Tyler letter to Master of Balliol College, Oxford, 25/2/1946, forwarded to the Ministry of Education, ED32/2482 NA.

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¹⁴² Notes of meeting between Eagar and Bosworth Smith, 15/1/1946, ED32/2482 NA.

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¹⁴⁶ Bosworth Smith, Note to the Secretary of State for Education, ED32/2482 NA

¹⁴⁷ 28/11/1946. ED32/2482 NA

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¹⁷⁷ Comments made by John Lorimer, 'Midland Branch,' *Teacher of the Blind* XL (1952): 100.

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¹⁸⁴ M. Colborne Brown, 'John Colligan, CBE – A life of commitment,' *The New Beacon* 83 (1999): 978. For Eagar, see Chapters Three and Five.

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¹⁸⁶ See particularly Chapter 1.1 and 3.4.

8. Worcester College after 1944. I: Becoming a Grammar School for blind boys

Whereas Worcester before 1944 had been asserting its distinctiveness as a public school, the tripartite system favoured by the Ministry after 1944 for special schools for the blind gave Worcester College a higher status as the grammar school for boys. Cook et al have acknowledged that students attending the grammar schools for the blind and the deaf have defended their schools on the grounds that confidence was promoted and they were able to gain opportunities for academic success, but these writers maintain that, by segregating, special schools were disadvantaging their pupils.¹ 'Handicapped' groups are perceived as being left as 'useless outsiders' as national policy changed.² However, this had not been the ethos behind Worcester College before 1944, so this chapter assesses whether the change to grammar school status had meant that pupils in this school for the blind were to be excluded and disabled in the manner which both French and Oliver have described.³

Again, as in the pre-war period, described in Chapters Three and Four, the history of Worcester College requires consideration of developments in schools for similar socio-economic groups of sighted pupils; there remains the need to get beyond attempts, such as those of Cole and Tomlinson, to assign a single dominant motivation to the study of special education.⁴ After the Butler Act, the College was modelling itself as a grammar school, rather than as a 'public school', so the conflicts which ensued have to be examined in terms of the 'dualism' within mainstream secondary schooling for the middle classes described by historians such as McCulloch.⁵ Only in these terms can the inter-relationship of State action and individual agency with class and gender be assessed.

One change which resulted from formal designation as a grammar school was the more rigid introduction of selection, so that the school would no longer take the same ability-range which, has been shown in Chapter Four, to have been the consequence of the need to boost numbers of fee-paying students. Chapter Seven has identified the problems surrounding the issue of selection generally, and within the schools for the blind, so this chapter weighs up the extent to which the stress on perceived intellectual, rather than financial, ability became the chief criteria for entry. The impact of the change to being a grammar school has to be assessed in terms of the social background of pupils brought into the school and the extent to which middle class values were to persist as part of the need which remained to 'validate' male pupils for entry into professional occupations.

The study of Worcester College in the inter-war era has highlighted the manner in which the complexities of class status should be considered in an historical study of special educational provision. Such influences should not be ignored in the immediate post-war period, because, as Chapter Seven has demonstrated, the social and cultural climate still provided parameters within which any school working to provide its students with opportunities for advancement would have to operate. However, with the school's position being protected and confirmed, they could now provide more of a lead within provision for blind children, thus ensuring that Worcester could go beyond 'doing good' for a few.⁶

8.1 National policy applied to the local level

Designation as a grammar school ensured that Worcester had a standing separate from the 'incapacity and inability' Tomlinson has assumed typical of special schools.⁷ A level of income and status were still assumed to be part of the character of the place when

Worcester was presented as the 'Blind Boys' Public School' in 1945, but, as the sole grammar school specifically catering for blind boys in England and Wales, the emphasis was to be upon selection through ability and a perceived capacity to take advantage of the opportunities provided.⁸ Worcester College was under pressure to conform to the standards demanded by members of the middle classes for whom the acquisition of status would not so much come through participation in elite activities, and networking, but through the acquisition of academic examination certificates which Banks, as a sociologist, had noted had become 'the passports to a better job' and therefore the opportunity to rise in the social scale.⁹ This was confirming the direction which Chapter Three has shown Bradnack as following in his first five years, and individuals on the staff and the Governors do play a role in promoting both change and continuity. These different influences ensured that national policy did not have an immediate and uncomplicated impact.

At Worcester College, the passage of the new Education Act may appear to have proceeded with little impact, other than that of safeguarding, and even strengthening, the school's status. Before the end of the war, the Ministry had confirmed Worcester College's status as a grammar school for students from the age of eleven and this designation would seem to have led to few adaptations in the nature and philosophy of the school.¹⁰ Brian Bradnack had taken charge before the war and remained headmaster until the end of the 1950s, and the Cobhams retained their dominant positions on the Board of Governors. The 1939 Prospectus continued to be issued, with an insert to update changes in fees and personnel, until 1953.¹¹ These people must have seen no immediate need to make a change and then the paper shortages of wartime and the immediate post-war years would have made any alteration appear an unnecessary extravagance.

Worcester College, and the NIB as its supervising charity, were still promoting its status as a public school. An advertisement of late 1944 stated it was 'the only public school for boys who are blind'.¹² The Secretary-General of the NIB claimed that Worcester College was trying to provide an education 'on the lines of an expensive public school ... beyond the normal grammar school standard'.¹³ The writer of the official Centenary history of the College, Bell, was to claim that the headmaster's goal was to 'consolidate' the College 'more closely into the pattern of the public school system'.¹⁴ Indeed, a Head Boy of the late 1950s would claim to a local journalist that 'outwardly Worcester College is the same as any public school'.¹⁵ The school was still tapping into the traditional professional middle class status of the boarding public schools. As has been shown in Chapter Four, with some level of private funding or influential backing essential to get boys to the school, the emphasis of the pre-war era had been on providing status through establishing an education in line with the public schools, and Worcester was still playing on some of the prestige this had given.

Certainly to outsiders, the College of the post-war period still appeared to be modelled on the public schools with their traditions and apparent sporting and academic priorities. This was not untypical of many of the pre-war secondary schools which came under state control as grammar schools after the 1944 Act in order to gain funding.¹⁶ The Royal Grammar School in Worcester became voluntary aided, but retained its traditions; continuing to celebrate its Founder's Day, as well as maintaining rowing as one of its main sports.¹⁷ In the 1950s, when the Headmaster of the Newcastle Royal Grammar School promoted the Classics, he was perceived as promoting a public school tradition.¹⁸

For Worcester in the late 1940s, the desire to put their students on a higher level still appears to have present amongst the governors. Governors wished to maintain rowing with its elite associations and agreed to appoint a master to concentrate on this and other athletic activities, in addition to having a Physical Education teacher.¹⁹ Some students report a 'feeling of being rather special' because they were a 'public school boy'.²⁰ There would even appear to have been a school argot, with boys demonstrating their status as students of the Classics, and thereby separate to those in the secondary modern schools, by identifying themselves to each other through a Latin greeting of 'Quis' and 'Ego'.²¹

As Secretary-General of the NIB and Clerk to the Governors, Eagar was the individual who remained most devoted to the public school model for Worcester College, and his vision could have ended not only the grammar school but even the school's existence as an independent institution. One former student recalled Eagar seeing him in around 1947 when he was at Oxford and telling him of an idea that he had to make the College a House in a public school.²² Eagar compared the prospect to that of Polack's house, the house that had been established for Jewish boys at Clifton College. Although this idea did not get as far as the school governors, and there is no other evidence to show that it was any more than an undeveloped thought, Eagar's discussions with the educational authorities do indicate his feeling that blind boys were still not getting the full benefits of a public school education. He wished for higher fees in order to further improve facilities, but was told that the LEAs would not pay any more, and the Ministry was not prepared to put in direct funding.²³ Conversations with the Ministry of Education showed something of the aims for the College of Eagar who at the time was speaking for the NIB:

The NIB are anxious that this school, which is small in comparison with other public schools, should be run on the lines of an expensive Public Boarding School.²⁴

In order to confirm a position as a public school, new appointments would need to be made to improve the levels of specialism on the staff. However these ambitions were opposed by Bosworth Smith, the Under-Secretary at the Ministry, who considered that 'LEAs should not be expected necessarily to meet the cost of expenditure incurred to bring the school beyond the normal grammar school standards'.²⁵

The boys of Worcester College were certainly given some advantages by their supervising authorities over those at other schools for the blind. Despite external pressures, in 1951, the NIB did get a higher fee of £300 per annum approved for Worcester College than that of £280 charged for Chorleywood, and even that of £285 for Condover Hall, their new school for blind students with additional disabilities.²⁶ Even with the assistance of a block grant from the Gardner's Trust, the school continued to have a deficit, so that, in 1955, Tylor reported that voluntary funds met eleven per cent of annual expenditure.²⁷ The NIB was meeting this shortfall, and so, perhaps, was keen to safeguard its interest by promoting the image of the public school and attempting to keep up the links with the HMC schools, which had been lost on the retirement of Brown, through the appointment of governors.²⁸

As headmaster, the Governors had Brian Bradnack, a man whose background and personality should have made him an unquestioning proponent of the 'public school' model. Bradnack had attended Repton public school during the headmasterships of William Temple and Geoffrey Fisher (both of whom were to become Archbishops of

Canterbury), and had gained the Military Cross as an officer in the First World War. He graduated from Brasenose College, Oxford and then worked as an Assistant Master at Dean Close, an HMC school, before being appointed to Worcester College. Three of the Dean Close staff had followed him up to Worcester, suggesting that the public school ethos might be confirmed and even strengthened at his new school.²⁹ His establishment of the 'House' system was seen by some as putting the school on a par with the public schools.³⁰ Bradnack had been a housemaster in his time at Dean Close, and the introduction of houses there had been seen as providing a 'natural competitiveness' as well as bringing 'new life, enthusiasm and loyalty'.³¹ For many the small size of Worcester meant the system was artificial but it was also portrayed as being 'an important advance towards responsible self-government'.³²

Bradnack was far from being a liberal in sympathy with a more egalitarian age, and his attitude would seem to be more that of a military commander than of a special school headmaster. When some prefects attempted to resign after coming into conflict with the Headmaster on an aspect of discipline, he wrote to a parent:

I refused to accept their resignations, and myself relieved them of their posts because, as I made clear to them, a subordinate officer does not accept office from a superior 'on certain terms' but when he has accepted it he is expected to carry out his superior's wishes.³³

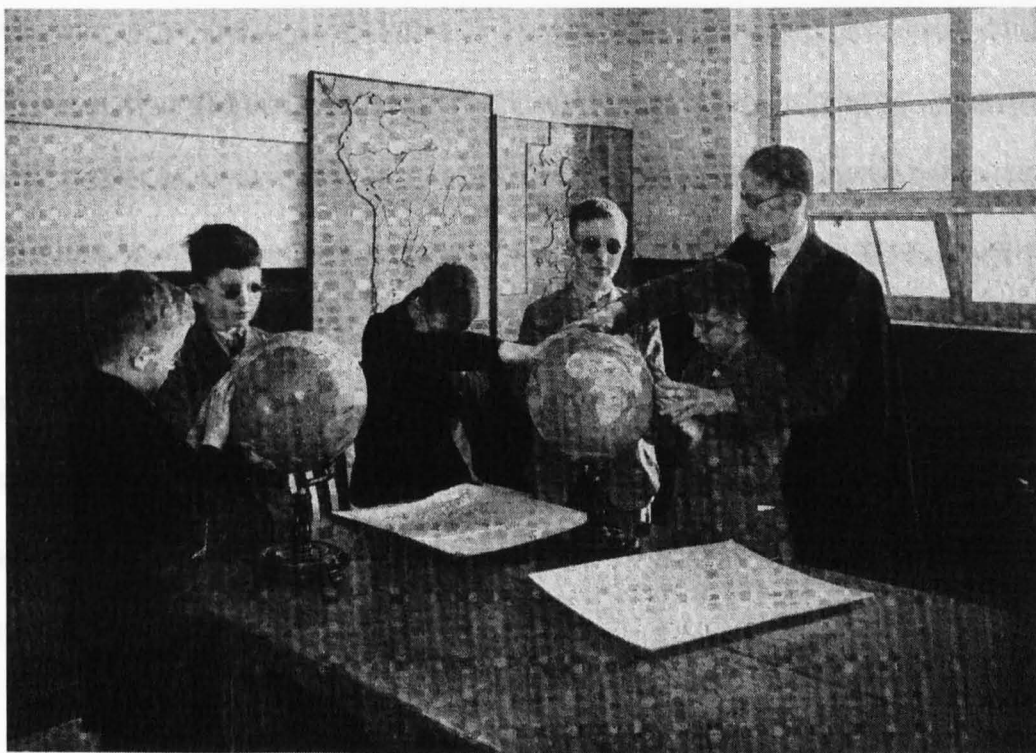
Bradnack was a strict disciplinarian, and had been appointed to ensure discipline after the laxity of the later days of Brown, just as he must have seen Fisher re-establish discipline at

Repton after the time of Temple.³⁴ He was perceived by his students as being very much a traditionalist Evangelical Anglican and Tory.³⁵ Boys were reprimanded if they were less than courteous to the maids, but this was because, for Bradnack, this was not the attitude of a gentleman.³⁶ He did lack the warmth of Brown and was seen as being inflexible in his approach. There was a fear of being caught breaking the rules and receiving the inevitable caning.³⁷ His lack of appreciation of contemporary popular culture did lead to friction and parental protest on an occasion when the Headmaster got exasperated at a student's constant playing of jazz music on his gramophone.³⁸

The headmaster was described by former students as a 'Protestant of the Protestants', and another as having 'deep, if eccentric, religious convictions' which could seem 'bigoted beyond hope of redemption'.³⁹ Bradnack was reported as having attempted to dismiss a member of staff who had converted to Catholicism but was apparently stopped by the school governors; although the member of staff did move on shortly after to a Catholic school.⁴⁰ Some students have felt that a student who was a German Jewish refugee, and was later to have a highly successful academic career, was not put forward for Oxford as a result of the headmaster's prejudices. However, student files appear to suggest that delays in finding appropriate funding meant that no places were available for the next academic year, and therefore a decision was made to go to another university rather than wait.⁴¹

Despite his formative influences and character, Bradnack played a key role in the school's evolution, demonstrating an awareness of the direction education was taking, and working to establish the school's position in the post-war tripartite structure. Former students mention their perception that he was taking the school away from slavish imitation of the Public School model.⁴² During his time at Dean Close, he had seen that school suffer as a

result of the Depression and competition with local secondary and grammar schools, and this may have made him aware even before the Butler Act of the need for change.⁴³ Bradnack appears to have decided to promote Worcester College as a grammar school; this type of education was not only perceived by most middle class parents as ‘an effective means of securing social advantage’, but it was also more likely to be considered as a reasonable use of public funds by LEAs.⁴⁴ Photographs in the school prospectus used throughout the 1940s, such as Illustration 8-A, stress the manner in which the school was delivering the full academic curriculum with only minor adaptations made for the educational disability. Rowing merited only two sentences and one photograph in the 1953 prospectus, in a section which also included scouting, chess and dramatic activities; this represented a great change from the days of Brown.⁴⁵ There was no longer a belief ‘that rowing was the ultimate physical exercise for the blind’ and all students were no longer forced to take part, hence the concern expressed by former students on the school Board of Governors.⁴⁶ Photographs such as Illustration 8-B, taken by a professional photographer in the 1950s, demonstrated a workmanlike emphasis on a disciplined physical fitness rather than on elite sports which fits in more with the grammar school tradition – but the athleticism and co-ordinated team display work would still suggest a striving towards conformity with the dominant models of masculinity, discussed in Chapter Four, rather than with the traditional stereotypes of the ‘disabled’.



WORCESTER COLLEGE FOR THE BLIND.

GEOGRAPHY CLASS WITH EMBOSSED GLOBES AND MAPS.

Illustration 8-A: Geography lesson, c. 1939. From the 1939 Prospectus.

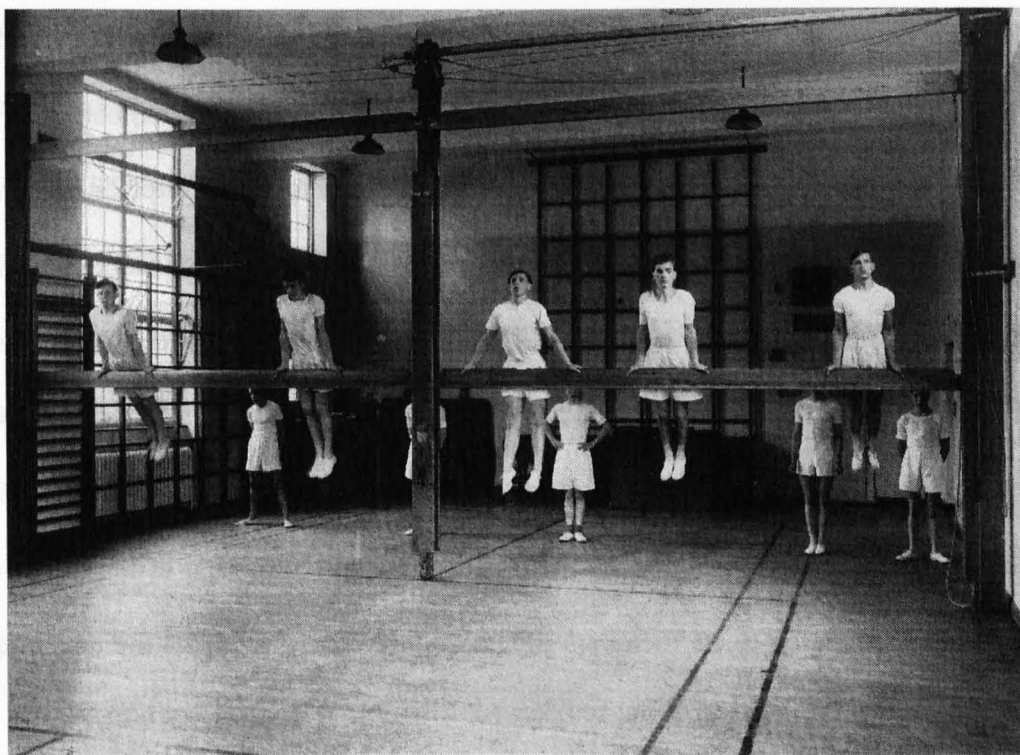


Illustration 8-B: Physical Education in the gymnasium.

This was part of the new wing opened by Stanley Baldwin in 1939.⁴⁷

The comments about post-war Worcester as a 'public school' quoted from Bell, the official historian of the school, as well as by the former head boy, appear more as a piece of school promotion to stress its unique nature. Allying the school with elements of public school values could mean that the children of the traditional clientele could also be preserved. However, the school had to adapt in order to gain the financial opportunities which the Act presented. In the somewhat unlikely hands of Bradnack, the school was changing to follow the model preferred by the Local Education Authorities and the increasing number of predominantly lower middle class and artisan parents for whom academic achievement would be essential if their son was to preserve, or gain, status within society.

8.2 *An opportunity restricted to the middle classes?*

As has been demonstrated in Chapter Four, the parents of most pre-war boys had been required to pay at least part of the fees, and this had restricted the numbers and social diversity of students. The situation after 1940 does seem to have reflected the changes described in Chapter Seven as taking place more generally during the Second World War, and perhaps in anticipation of a new Act, LEAs allowed the sons of a sheet-metal worker, a mechanic and a dairyman to join the school.⁴⁸ The funding change created by the 1944 Act then enabled the school to provide opportunities for an increasing number of students. As a result, the social background of the students did broaden, although in many ways they were still being prepared to be members of the middle classes with all the advantages in terms of status this could offer.

By March 1944, the governors were told that the number of applicants was 'likely to exceed the number of vacancies'.⁴⁹ This increase in prospective students could only be the

consequence of an increased readiness to provide public funds for secondary education. One student, who had been tested by Bradnack during a visit to the BRIB school, was admitted fairly soon after the passing of the Act when his local authority agreed to pay the fees.⁵⁰ There was some resistance to the costs of a grammar school education from LEAs such as Northamptonshire which was only prepared to pay the same fee as they paid to the BRIB. Nevertheless, by 1950, only four students were not wholly paid for by Education Authorities; one of the exceptions was a student blinded during the Greek civil war. As a consequence of the increased involvement of the State, the role played by charities was changing with the Gardner's Trust withdrawing its scholarships for secondary education.⁵¹

The increase in applications meant that the governors had already decided they could be tougher on those 'unlikely to make a success of secondary education', with two being encouraged to leave at sixteen.⁵² Although the BRIB pupil entered at fourteen, the Governors decided to give preference to younger boys, putting pressure on other schools to recommend candidates earlier, and boosting Bradnack's hopes of improving examination results. Selection took place on terms that would appear to have conformed to much of the thinking of Sir Cyril Burt, as shown in Chapter Seven. Boys were chosen on the basis of their ability and also on an estimation of the benefit they could gain. This was supposed to be regardless of social background, but there were elements of subjective judgement which were more difficult to define and which could have favoured those from a middle class family. The assessment procedure initially was based on an oral examination, as well as some reading and mathematics, but, with the need to validate grammar school status, it was to become more formalised with students attending for three days during which their reading, writing and mathematics were assessed, and their personal skills were 'watched'.⁵³ Bradnack was looking for 'character, [and a] right attitude to learning' which he saw as the

two key qualities necessary for a boy to show he could 'make good at a grammar school' and achieve 'success in after life'.⁵⁴

Despite accusations that in other schools such criteria very much favoured the 'ambitious middle classes in mainstream schools', who could pay for extra lessons, this was not as socially discriminatory at Worcester College and this was because of the nature of their catchment schools.⁵⁵ The failure of the plans for a preparatory school at Whittington Hall (described in Chapter Seven) meant that most recruitment would have to come from the existing schools for the blind with their broad social intake. For the entrance examination introduced by Bradnack, there were comprehension and composition exercises with an expectation that students would use Grade II Braille fluently and accurately. A Taylor Frame was to be used for calculations on the Four Rules of number, although long division was not tested (see Appendices B and C).⁵⁶ Some flexibility was shown so that a boy already at a grammar school could do the test orally, but generally the demands of the test meant that students already in special education were at an advantage; of fifty-nine pupils admitted between 1949 and 1955, forty came from schools for the blind, with an additional nine from other special schools.⁵⁷

By the late 1940s, the students recorded as coming from a working class background appeared to be equal in number to those from a middle class background; this compares with the 66.4 per cent of children from the professional and managerial classes estimated by Halsey, Heath and Ridge to be in mainstream grammar schools between 1943 and 1952.⁵⁸ Fathers included a couple of mechanics, as well as a dyers' labourer.⁵⁹ These working class students were alongside the sons of a hotel proprietor and senior civil servants. The incidental expenses such as daily travel and lack of potential income at the

school leaving age were to be less of an issue for a boarding school whose students had to stay in education until sixteen.⁶⁰ The issue of grammar school uniform was to be a problem as it could be for parents of mainstream pupils.⁶¹ Paying for all the items on the clothes list was to be a source of conflict between authorities and some parents.⁶²

Middle class boys have felt that they were not really aware of a class difference, although they recall differences in accents.⁶³ However, working class boys have highlighted the class difference and recall a fear of exposure and ridicule. The son of a docker experienced embarrassment when required to write about 'My house'. He decided it would be dishonest to describe another house, but got criticised and laughed at for 'forgetting' to include the established middle class feature of a bathroom; for his family, the toilet was an outside hut and the bath was brought in from the bike shed at weekends.⁶⁴ He had a strong Northern accent by Worcester standards, but must have adjusted to the school's standards, as, at home, he was ridiculed for 'talking posh'.⁶⁵ It would appear that, in order to be accepted, pupils had to demonstrate the features and qualities of middle class status.

Peter White has described the social mix of the school in the 1950s as being in the 'vanguard of a revolution', bringing together the 'Dog and Duck with the Ritz'.⁶⁶ This was not the primary intention but was a necessary prerequisite of financial stability. The school was no longer a public school, but a grammar school. For these blind boys, the 1944 Act and Worcester College were providing a definite opportunity, and this example was beginning to have a broader impact on the special education of blind children.

8.3 Worcester College as a Special School

The 1944 Education Act guaranteed Worcester College a full school of funded students, and provided the confidence gained from having a legal status different, and by the standards of people's perceptions, superior to the other special schools for the blind. Worcester College extended its links with other schools for the blind to ensure recruitment, but the change to a grammar school also resulted in the establishment of a more positive position amongst special schools. Bradnack demonstrated more of a desire to show expertise at the forefront of special education. There was a tension in views of how the school was going to present itself, but the strategy to promote the image and opportunities of students in the school did adapt. The goals for their students still pulled them outside the traditional special school model, which suggests that students were not segregated from the 'outside' world, and this difference in approach was to continue to be important for the advancement of education for the blind in the future.

Worcester College was following the model of public and grammar schools, in terms of giving students two afternoons off each week for sports, but there were some signs of an alteration in the nature of the social contact achieved through clubs. There were still links with local grammar and public schools. Rowing matches took place against the Royal Grammar School and King's School in Worcester. Swimming matches took place against Kingham and Bromsgrove schools, but another opponent in the pool and on the athletics track was the Royal Normal College.⁶⁷ The Meccano Club did go socially, if not geographically, more widely afield in terms of the nature of contacts made with visits to Morgan cars in Malvern and the railway works in Worcester, and even the boys from Samuel Southall School, a local secondary modern school.⁶⁸

There were other changes which demonstrated an increased acceptance of a position in special education. Sports were no longer centred upon those in which blind people could compete as equals without modifications. Under Bradnack, with their position established, the school was able to encourage sports aimed specifically at visually impaired people. Blind cricket was more actively promoted. However, tensions over the role of sport in promoting a sense of equality in physical ability remained. Professionally-taken photographs still demonstrated sighted students playing traditional cricket (Illustration 8-C) rather than the scene more typical to blind cricket as is evident in Illustration 8-D; a larger ball can be seen, and there a number of blind fielders waiting to catch after the one bounce permitted.⁶⁹ Also, a football pitch was created, with goals provided and games were played against local teams. However, even with the assistance of some staff, the school lost and the publicity the game received caused a former student on the Governors to query whether such activities were ‘appropriate’.⁷⁰



Illustration 8-C: Boys playing cricket in the post-war era.



Illustration 8-D: Informal photograph of boys playing blind cricket.

The attitude towards other schools for the blind had a similar ambivalence. As will be shown in the next chapter, some members of the teaching staff were getting involved in projects to develop the education of the blind, with Bradnack continuing to play a major role in the CTB. There was an increased preparedness to mix, as long as the superiority of Worcester was recognised. Staff from other special schools working towards the regulatory CTB examinations could visit Worcester, but Bradnack could see no value in his teachers going to the Royal Normal College or those designated as secondary moderns, despite the work these establishments were doing in teaching and beginning to research the use of Braille.⁷¹

The key individuals guiding Worcester College still sought to avoid any image of the school being equated to the standards of the other special schools. They were now more formally part of the structure of special education, but they were keen to show the

difference of their students. There was an ambiguity in their approach towards the nature of disability.

8.4 Working within a Disabling Society

Just as had been the case in the two secondary schools between the wars, men who were blind were continuing to play a role and did influence developments, although they showed the same awareness of the constraints of society's influence as the Headmaster. One of the key areas of contention in studying the position of the 'blind' within the 'disabled' has been a consideration of how all groups have often been perceived as if they were a single entity, with no allowance made for differences between types and levels of impairment. School perceptions of the limitations imposed by blindness were still very different to assumptions made about other forms of 'disability'.

Sir Beachcroft Towse had to stand down as the NIB Chairman in 1944, and, although he was made president, his poor health did not allow him to remain active. Instead, a sighted war-hero, General Sir Hastings Ismay agreed to be the new Chairman of the Executive Council in 1946. He did not visit Worcester College until 1951, and was still a busy public figure who moved out of his position in the Chair when he took control of N.A.T.O.⁷² With members of the Cobham family continuing as Chairmen of the Governors through the 1940s and 1950s, it might appear that the blind were playing less of a role in influencing the direction of policy towards, and in, the school. However, a blind businessman, Godfrey Robinson, who had been Vice-Chairman, did become Chairman of the NIB in 1952. Theodore Tylor, an Oxford don and a former student, joined the College Governors and was to go on to be Chairman of the RNIB by the late 1950s. He was accompanied on the

Governors as an NIB representative by Rupert Cross, another 'old boy' of Worcester College, and also an Oxford Law fellow.

These men had a key influence, although they were to prove to be conservative in their approach to issues relating to disability. In the late 1950s, Tylor and Cross had apparent concerns about preserving the reputation of blind people in the profession and opposed blind solicitors being allowed to practise as sole practitioners.⁷³ Tylor was chairman of the NIB Lawyers' Group, and asserted the right of this Group's panel to vet Law candidates for their suitability. Tylor's intervention to Bradnack came after a student had been sent by his father to read Law at Liverpool University against the advice of the lawyers on the Governors.⁷⁴ The panel was reported as being generally encouraging, but obviously monitored the nature of the students; although class in itself was not a key point, with one student seen as suitable who was 'amiable but not 'aristocratic', another was turned down because he did not have 'quite the right personality' so they doubted he would succeed in private practice once he had qualified.⁷⁵

The Governors and staff of the school as a whole were certainly not social revolutionaries. The views of Bradnack and the Governors on gender had changed little from before the war. Boys were not expected to do domestic chores, and in this the school was following the model of mainstream grammar schools. In fact, women had very little influence on the school, except as the wives of members of staff or as the school matron or housekeeper in a subordinate domestic role. The conservatism of some of the Governors was evident in the opposition expressed when the appointment of the first woman Governor was discussed in 1950, although only the representative from the Gardner's Trust spoke out against the

year's trial for Mrs Cavenagh as a 'useful woman governor' the next year.⁷⁶ In fact, she stayed on the Governors but the board remained dominated by men.

The role of blind men on the governors did not always mean sensitivity towards issues of special education, although this was more a consequence of the character of individuals involved and their views of the other former elementary schools; they did not want the students to be associated with the 'disabled' world. Tylor appears to have been influenced by his own experiences and educational needs and was sceptical at the time of the inspection when the inspectors identified a need for teaching aids in geometry.⁷⁷ He also deprecated the fact that College students were taken to participate in the annual Braille reading competition.⁷⁸

What men such as Tylor and Cross did recognise was the level of challenge facing Worcester College's students as they attempted to make their way into successful and gainful employment. Their caution must have been confirmed by the blind men who came in to give careers advice.⁷⁹ The society of the post-war world may have been more supportive in terms of the Welfare State but it was not one in which a blind person would find it easy to succeed in the professions. In fact, a higher level of ability seemed to be expected for blind people going into such occupations. Bradnack did not challenge this, but appeared to accept and work within such constraints. His boys, like other minority groups in this era, had to compete by being superior to other candidates; otherwise they had to find an alternative career path.⁸⁰ Bradnack was a member of the Central Advisory Committee on Training for the Ministry. When a boy's failure at Higher Certificate had jeopardized a university place, he told the parents that, while the Church Selection Board would,

certainly not reject a blind candidate on account of his blindness, they do tend (as I think rightly) to take the line that a Blind man has to be outstandingly good in some respect in order to counterbalance the disadvantages under which his blindness obviously puts him in other respects.⁸¹

However, the problems for a blind person were not as acute as those for those with additional impairments, and the 'differential public sympathy' described by Hall again becomes evident.⁸² Bradnack's attitude was typical of those in a society which would not provide any additional help and which struggled to see the potential in those with some disabilities.⁸³ The headmaster declined to recommend a student to a 'Redbrick' university because of additional needs, despite the fact that he had 'almost outpaced my Modern Language master when he left us'.⁸⁴ The young man would appear to have had neurological problems and was reported as developing serious psychological issues in adolescence with his skills of 'social adaptation' being reported as being 'entirely undeveloped'; an assessment of his social difficulties which is supported by his contemporaries.⁸⁵ Bradnack expressed particular concerns about the student's serious mobility problems which resulted in his becoming 'lost in the most restricted and familiar surroundings', and considered that his needs were so great that it would be wrong to put an individual to the 'inconvenience which someone would have to undergo to get him to the university'.⁸⁶ In fact, the university did accept this young man and he did gain a degree after spending a year in Germany. However, the problems faced by those who did have additional disabilities, which prevented them from conforming to 'normal' expectations,

were demonstrated in his apparent lack of success in finding employment before his death in his forties.⁸⁷

For students whose primary impairment was blindness, there were difficulties in gaining advancement but, by the 1940s, there were enough former students now capable of taking a leading role on the governors and in the NIB to ensure that this group of the 'disabled' could work to enable some opportunities for employment to be available.

8.5 Summary

Whilst writers such as French have bemoaned a lack of 'insider voices' influencing special education, the history of Worcester College continues to demonstrate the extent to which the blind were not powerless figures.⁸⁸ However, what this case study does show is the constraints of external attitudes to blindness. As was evident before the Second World War, both blind and sighted people were influenced by, and in some cases reinforcing, the assumptions of the time. Just as had been the case for Brown, Mowatt and Ranger in Chapter Three, men such as Bradnack and Tylor were cautious in their approach, working within the constraints and not challenging attitudes which still existed.

The headmaster and governors were aware of the important place which class retained and were keen to ensure that the advantages of gaining a middle class education were realised through the status the College's male pupils gained in adult life. The realities of gaining state funding, and the altered catchment in terms of social class, meant that in the post-war period it was the grammar school model of education which had to be adopted. The

rationale behind operating a mainstream curriculum cannot be described as disabling, but its results will be shown in the next chapter to have not fully 'enabled' all students.

8.6 References

¹ Cook et al, 'Voices', 296.

² Armstrong, 446.

³ French, *Barriers and coping strategies*, 28: Oliver, *Understanding*, 79-80.

⁴ See 1.1.

⁵ McCulloch, 'Middle Classes,' 694.

⁶ Tomlinson, *Profile*, 130.

⁷ Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 20.

⁸ Title of an article about WCB, *Picture Post*, 26 May 1945, 17.

⁹ O. Banks, *Parity and Prestige in English Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), 96.

¹⁰ See Chapter 7.

¹¹ See Chapter 4.2.

¹² 'INVISIBLE model' Advertisement, *The Times*, 3 November 1944.

¹³ Interview Note, Meeting of W.McG Eagar and T. Tylor with Bosworth Smith, Miss Elliott and Mr Kershaw of the Ministry of Education, 15/9/1945, ED32/1274 NA.

¹⁴ Bell, 74.

¹⁵ H.E.H. Davies, 'Windows for the Blind,' *Worcester Evening News*, 9 October 1957.

¹⁶ James, 512.

¹⁷ F. V. Follett, *A History of the Worcester Royal Grammar School* (Worcester: Ebenezer Baylis, 1951).

¹⁸ B. Mains and A. Tuck (ed.), *Royal Grammar School Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (Stocksfield: Oriel, 1986), 294.

¹⁹ WCB Gov Mins, 10/3/1944.

²⁰ Interview John.

²¹ 'Who' and 'I'. NCWFSA email forum and White, 89.

²² Interview Paul, also mentioned by John.

²³ Interview Note, 15/9/1945, ED32/1274 NA.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ministry of Education Note approving fees, 23/8/1951, NA ED32/2483.

²⁷ Inspection WCB 1955, minutes of a meeting with the Governing Body, 2.

²⁸ WCB Gov Mins, 24/10/1952: WCB was not listed as a school eligible for membership in 1945, Report of the Committee, 1945, HMC Committee Minutes MSS588/6/1. MRC. This loss of status remained a source of regret. Report of Meeting of Sub-Committee of WCB Governors, 14/2/1956, FC2 NCW.

²⁹ Eric Baxter, G. Roberts and Dr. F. Westcott.

³⁰ Interview Bill.

³¹ R.F. McNeile, *A History of Dean Close School* (Shrewsbury: Wilding, 1966), 36.

³² Interviews with former students: 'National Institute for the Blind,' *British Journal of Nursing* 89 (1941): 213. Available online, Royal College of Nursing at http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/rcn_archives/historical_nursing_journals (7/6/2010)

³³ Student file, unsent letter to parent 26/7/1948 NCW.

³⁴ E. Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1991), 18-9.

³⁵ NCWFSA comments, Colin 15/7/2003.

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ NCWFSA

- ³⁸ Letter to Lord Cobham by B.O. Bradnack, 5/10/1942. Bradnack said he deliberately swore at a student who was nearly eighteen. Student files NCW.
- ³⁹ PQ and JAW, 'Obituary B.O. Bradnack MC MA.,' *The New Beacon* 57 (1973): 45-6.
- ⁴⁰ Comments John NCWFSA forum, based on what he had been told later by Tylor.
- ⁴¹ Letter from Bradnack to University Grants Committee, 15/5/1950. Student files, NCW.
- ⁴² Interviews with Richard and Paul.
- ⁴³ McNeile, 42-3.
- ⁴⁴ McCulloch, 'Middle Classes', 698.
- ⁴⁵ WCB, 1953 Prospectus, NCW.
- ⁴⁶ 'Obituary Bradnack' *The New Beacon*: WCB GovMins, 22/6/51 NCW.
- ⁴⁷ B4, NCW.
- ⁴⁸ Student files, NCW.
- ⁴⁹ WCB Gov Mins, 10/3/1944.
- ⁵⁰ Interview with Richard, one of the few students to defend Bradnack who he considered had gone out of his way to help him get into the school.
- ⁵¹ WCB GovMins, 2/3/1945.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 22/10/1943.
- ⁵³ White, 64.
- ⁵⁴ Staff meeting minutes memorandum on College entrance examination, Feb. 1956, NCW.
- ⁵⁵ James, 511-2.
- ⁵⁶ Ministry of Education, Note of Visit 30/5/1949. Colin, NCWFSA email forum 14/6/2010.
- ⁵⁷ Colin email. Nine came from ordinary sighted schools and one from home. Inspection WCB 1955, 2.

⁵⁸ A.H. Halsey, A.F. Heath, and J.M. Ridge, *Origins and Destinations: Family, Class, and Education in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), Table 4.9.

⁵⁹ Student files, NCW.

⁶⁰ General problems for working class grammar school students described in G. Sutherland, 'Education', in F.M.L. Thompson, *Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 163.

⁶¹ James, 511.

⁶² WCB Gov Mins, 20/10/1950.

⁶³ Interview Mike.

⁶⁴ Comments on NCWFSA forum, Colin.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ White, 90.

⁶⁷ *Pimpernel*, 1948: 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, (1948): 23, (1952): 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, (1947): 20.

⁷⁰ WCB Gov Mins, 5/3/1954

⁷¹ WCB Gov Mins, 20/10/1950: John Lorimer at Lickey Grange in 1954 was beginning his research on the nature of Braille, M. Tobin, 'Obituary – John Lorimer', *The New Beacon* 76 (1992): 901.

⁷² 'Blind Boys' Success,' *The Times*, 25 June 1951, 2.

⁷³ Email to author from Sir John Wall, 29/10/2005.

⁷⁴ WCB Gov Mins, 5/11/1948.

⁷⁵ Student file, 1953.

⁷⁶ WCB Gov Mins, 20/10/1950 and 2/3/1951.

⁷⁷ Inspection WCB 1955, minutes of a meeting with the Governing Body, 3. ED195/99 NA.

⁷⁸ WCB GovMins, 25/10/1946.

⁷⁹ Inspection WCB 1955, 15.

⁸⁰ Gordon and Humphries, 136-9, have outlined the problems which people with other disabilities faced in their attempts to get equal opportunities at work. Pugh, *Women*, 288, has shown that women in the higher professions had only increased from 5% to 9% between 1921 and 1966.

⁸¹ Bradnack, letter to parent 8/9/1947, Student file NCW.

⁸² Hall, 19.

⁸³ Gordon and Humphries describe the problems experienced by a young man with cerebral palsy, 136-7.

⁸⁴ Letter Bradnack to University, Student file, NCW.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: Discussion with former students.

⁸⁶ letter Bradnack to University, Student file, NCW

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: Discussion with former students.

⁸⁸ French, *Oral History*, 413.

9. Worcester College for the Blind after 1944. II: Enabling or Disabling?

Whereas the last chapter has shown the impact of the acquisition of grammar school status, the work of a special school again needs to be judged in terms of whether the education provided was 'enabling' in giving its pupils the skills and cultural capital required in order to integrate successfully in adult society. While French has considered that the former grammar school students did have a more positive experience than most other blind children, this judgement appears to have been made almost solely in terms of the achievement of academic qualifications. She perceives other aspects of the 'segregation' of students into special schools after the 1944 Act as continuing to exclude and disadvantage disabled children.¹ Worcester as a grammar school in the post-war world did have to place more emphasis on the passing of examinations if the boys were to be able to compete and guarantee a secure position in the middle classes, but the nature of the education needs closer scrutiny in order to determine whether this was allowing all of the boys to advance towards becoming 'citizens'.²

Chapter Four has demonstrated that the picture for Worcester College was more complex than simply being 'enabling' or 'disabling'; Longmore has shown how, in order to benefit from the 'provisional and partial tolerance of the non-handicapped majority', the 'disabled' have had to make a 'continuous cheerful striving toward normalization' and Bradnack and Brown had both encouraged their pupils to demonstrate their ability to compete normally in some areas while ignoring some of the visibly 'blind' adaptations.³ After the introduction of the 1944 Education Act, there remained the danger that by going outside the model of the special school curriculum, there could be a failure to develop the other skills in life

required if the students were to be truly capable of independence as they progressed into adulthood.

Worcester College continued to occupy a unique position in the education of blind boys. The chapter begins with an assessment of what the designation as a grammar school meant for the curriculum, and evaluates the extent to which the need to maintain this status led to the adoption of a more traditional approach which did not necessarily meet all individual needs. The extent to which the school was working to 'enable' its pupils, as well as the constraints which the social attitudes towards the 'disabled' were continuing to represent, are discussed in terms of the education delivered and future careers. Equally the inter-war years have shown how the agency of individuals, both blind and sighted, could challenge perceptions and create opportunities, so, for the school to remain as more than a mere exception to a general rule in special education, progress in creating curriculum innovation is also examined.

9.1 Following a Grammar School curriculum

As demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four on the inter-war years, the need to allow students to gain the higher status which came with following an academic curriculum was pushing Worcester College outside the special school model. Although writers such as Borsay consider that after 1944 poorly qualified teachers in special schools continued to deliver an inferior quality curriculum with the result that their students were 'disabled' by still gaining 'below-average qualifications', at Worcester College the acquisition of the certificates of an academic education was aimed at allowing students the opportunity to

advance.⁴ Peter White, a former student who is now the BBC Disability Affairs Correspondent, has described the school's approach as straightforward:

The philosophy went something like this; blindness is perceived by the rest of the world as a disadvantage, but send out your boy stuffed to the gills with O and A levels and degrees, and they will have at least a chance of competing.⁵

In 1945, Worcester College had still boasted that students were able to 'take all the subjects normally taught at a public school'.⁶ As was the case with most of the schools designated as grammars under the 1944 Education Act, Worcester was trying to advance its students by being perceived as pursuing the old public school standards.⁷

Nevertheless, success in the provision of the academic curriculum was not always consistent and again the need to create a more complex picture which considers context becomes evident. White was discussing his time at the College from the late 1950s, but standards had not always been uniform during and immediately after the war. The rationing of food and fuel, as well the shortage of maids created by the existence of better paid jobs in war service, had an impact on living conditions within the school. National Service removed some of the teaching staff and made the task of finding suitable replacements difficult for the headmaster. Only after the war was the staffing able to increase so that there were improvements not only in the housekeeping, but also in curriculum provision with more teaching available for the older boys.

Unlike in the more financially-constrained times of the 1920s and 1930s discussed in Chapter Four, staffing was able to follow the model of 'higher status' grammar schools in recruiting graduates as subject specialists. By the mid-1950s, members of staff were described by an inspection team led by Winifred Deavin, the former Chorleywood teacher, as qualified academically for the work they were undertaking and 'in the main competent teachers'.⁸ Eight of the ten teachers were graduates, with the PE specialist and the teacher of the first years both having a teaching qualification.⁹ Six of the staff had gained the CTB diploma. The general quality of teaching had improved from that reflected in the 1931 report and was helped by the fact that, by 1955, the staffing of the school had become fairly stable.¹⁰ Eight had been teaching for between seven and twenty-six years, although for four it was their first teaching post. However, there were still the potential disadvantages of insularity evident in the pre-war school. With many staff lacking a teaching qualification, and with no requirement in the CTB qualification for a placement in another establishment, some teachers could have lacked a broader appreciation of mainstream and special education.¹¹

The increased levels of staffing were accompanied by an effort to enable more appropriate provision than had always been possible in the 1930s.¹² In order to ensure that the most academic students were encouraged, there was a stream leading to Higher Certificate and university entrance, but there was another for those who were to do physiotherapy, shorthand typing or telephony. Students could do the full range of academic subjects for School Certificate, with many of these subjects also being offered at Higher and later Advanced Level. Most students were expected to sit nine 'O' Levels, including General Science and Mathematics.¹³

Bradnack has been accused of showing little interest in students who were unwilling to follow the route through examinations and on to university.¹⁴ In the era immediately after the passing of the Butler Act, the grammar schools for the blind were sure of gaining LEA funding for its pupils, and some former students feel that he could have been more innovative in ensuring that all had an appropriate curriculum.¹⁵ However, Bradnack and the Governors still did not perceive that freedom. They felt the need to match the standards of mainstream grammar schools in order to validate the school and provide the opportunities for advancement for the more able students. The preoccupations of mainstream inspection reports demonstrate how getting scholarships or a sufficient number of students into prestigious institutions was an important part of any judgement made on the effectiveness of a grammar school.¹⁶ This necessitated higher level examination success. In the post-1945 period, more of the students who were going on to university did Higher Certificate than had been the case in the 1930s and then, after its introduction in 1951, success in at least two 'A' Level subjects became a general requirement for matriculation.¹⁷

The College was going to be judged against other special schools and had to be seen as offering something distinct. This was evident when the inspectors who visited in 1955 commented, in a way that was not apparent in other grammar school inspections, that one of the 'good features' was that there was little directly vocational training; this distinguished the College from most other special schools which had become the equivalent of the secondary moderns after the 1944 Act.¹⁸ Students who did not reach the required standard tended therefore to be sent on to the Royal Normal College, the 'technical' school for the blind. This process did not always serve students that well. One student who was transferred, failed at shorthand training and piano tuning, but later, with

the encouragement of a primary school headmistress and assistance from an education officer, was able to have a successful career after qualifying as a primary school teacher.¹⁹

In the 1940s, the school did allow the most academically-able students to progress and take their School and Higher Certificates early, thus giving the opportunity to pursue other interests on additional courses, as well as to prepare for scholarship examinations. Paul and John, two former students who were to gain Oxbridge places, had acquired Higher Certificate by the age of sixteen.²⁰ Paul then did German, whilst John took Music and Ancient Greek to School Certificate standard and Colonial History as an additional Higher Certificate subsidiary. Another boy who had taken two years further Latin and French was reckoned already to be at university level before he had left.²¹ Four students gained state scholarships in the 1950s.²²

An examination of the qualifications achieved does demonstrate that the College was enabling many blind boys to get the type of secondary education which could lead into the professions. Over forty per cent of the thirty students who left the school from 1946-48 gained Higher Certificate, and seventy-five per cent gained School Certificate.²³ This compares with the High Wycombe Royal Grammar School where seventeen per cent of the boys who left gained Higher Certificate and seventy per cent School Certificate in the years from 1946-8.²⁴ Worcester did benefit from the difficulty its students would experience in gaining employment at sixteen or seventeen, unlike at Luton Grammar school for boys where good prospects in the area led to it losing two-thirds of a school year group before the sixth form.²⁵

Difficulties came as a result of some of the changes which affected mainstream education as well. The introduction of 'O' level examinations in 1951 was to cause problems. The regulations in operation in the first year stated that students had to be sixteen to take the examinations, and this meant that those who were younger in the year had their education disrupted. One student progressed on to 'A' Level without taking his Science 'O' Level, despite having studied the course.²⁶ History, in particular, suffered an unusually poor set of results, which was put down to insufficient teaching time being made available for the demands of the new course.²⁷

Many Worcester College students have given a positive assessment of the nature of the education they received, considering that the school allowed the achievement of very good examination results as a preliminary to gaining fulfilling careers.²⁸ As has been shown to be the case in the inter-war period, boys were being prepared for membership of the middle classes because this was seen as providing a higher status which would be enabling for them. In other ways, the school still reflected the complexities of contemporary society, and the need to maintain a position outside the standard special school model. However, student consideration of the significance of their success in external examinations highlights the manner in which it cannot automatically be assumed that all schools providing special education were 'disabling'.

9.2 An 'Enabling' classroom experience?

With the increased emphasis in the grammar school on the passing of examinations, there was even more pressure on the curriculum which could have prevented the acquisition of the range of skills required if students were to be enabled to become citizens, participating in society.²⁹ Worcester College was facing the continuing problem of how to meet external

standards to show equality without ignoring the broader needs of blind children. Just as with the pre-war school described in Chapter Four, there are indications that the education provided did not constitute 'progress' in all aspects. Assessments from former students differ on the value of some of the teaching they received. By adopting the standard model of a grammar school, there may have been a far less positive and enabling experience for those who lacked independent motivation, or who were not particularly academic in their aptitudes; and this again shows the need to assess special education in less simplistic terms than presented by writers such as Cole and Borsay so that the criteria for success can be properly evaluated.³⁰

Inspectors did criticise aspects of the curriculum and considered that some members of the teaching staff were not paying sufficient attention to the 'development of teaching techniques appropriate to the blind or the compilation of schemes of work calculated to meet their special needs'.³¹ Some of the students have been critical of the manner in which teaching in the years up to first external examination was characterised by exposition, with little attempt made to ensure all students were motivated.³² These students describe the dependence on dictation, or the expectation to write notes.³³ This weakness is borne out, in part, by judgements made about History and other lessons by school Inspectors who commented on the manner in which note-taking or reading aloud from books, to overcome difficulties in acquiring background knowledge, left little time for discussion.³⁴ Part of the reason for this can be linked to the context. Worcester was still at a disadvantage compared to other boys' grammar schools with a lack of Braille textbooks in English, Science, Geography and Latin still hindering reading around the class and independent research.³⁵

However, despite these inconveniences, other students who went into the Sixth Form consider that they were taught to evaluate opinions and so were given a 'more university-style notion of education'.³⁶ Inspectors commented that the History teaching of Bradnack was 'fluent and [showed] vivid delineation', with the other teacher being 'scholarly' and having a 'gift for the expressive phrase'. The 'lively' discussion in English and the manner in which oral work in Religious Instruction was 'skilfully guided' were also praised.³⁷ Some interviewees consider they went up to university with both the core skills and the good background knowledge needed to feel they were academically the equal of their sighted peers.³⁸

The subjects singled out for praise by the Inspectors indicate the extent to which the curriculum was still based around the Arts subjects and Ancient and Modern Languages. French, Latin and then History were the most popular subjects for 'A' Level in 1951 and 1952, with only individual success in Geography, Music, Mathematics and English.³⁹ It was in the Languages that students were encouraged to become particularly active in their learning. The curriculum had expanded with German and Greek occasionally being added to the French and Latin offered to all students.⁴⁰ The assessment of the inspectors was that 'achievement [was] best in linguistic subjects but generally very fair'. In French, there was use throughout the school of songs, games, tactual aids and experiments with a speech-recording apparatus as well as the use of broadcasts and gramophone records. The level of specialist expertise developed in the department, enabling the boys to reach grammar school academic standards, was demonstrated by the use of French Braille contractions.⁴¹

Endeavours were being made in the curriculum to ensure that pupils had an awareness of the outside world and were not left completely isolated and segregated. The French

Department took students to French plays and other departments organised visits to the Assize Courts, ironstone districts and Worcester cathedral.⁴² The subjects discussed by the Literary and Debating Society, as well as some of the articles which students contributed to the school magazine, confirm some of the broader perspectives they had gained on the world; these included a debate on the proposition 'That wars have done more harm than good' and a talk defending Nationalization, as well as an article on the 'Spread of Communism in Eastern Europe'.⁴³

Nevertheless, the continuation of some of those weaknesses in the curriculum described in Chapter Four suggests that a more complex judgement is needed to assess whether the education was enabling. Despite the efforts of some staff, the inspectors who visited in the 1950s, considered that there were deficiencies on the practical and aesthetic side, 'both of which need developing with blind pupils'.⁴⁴ Beyond the third form woodwork was voluntary, but this was also the case at Manchester Grammar School, where the workshops were used outside timetable time, and at Windsor Boys' School where the Sixth Form did art or handicraft in their 'minority time'.⁴⁵ As a grammar school, and one maintaining its desire to step outside the traditional image of the elementary special schools, Worcester College did not place an emphasis on practical skills as part of the formal curriculum.

The inspectors were also disappointed with Music which they had expected would be the 'main outlet for artistic impulses'.⁴⁶ Practical musicianship had been important for a number of former students, but this was the consequence of the development of an individual talent. Although it was possible for the exceptional student to study Music for General Certificate of Education examinations, there was little class teaching, with musical development being mainly as a result of instrumental lessons taught to individuals.⁴⁷ As

demonstrated in Chapter Eight, Bradnack not only appears to have disliked modern 'jazz' music, but he also seems to have had little affinity for the academic study of the subject which was based on Classical Music; this was perceived as inferior to other academic routes which gave a more guaranteed career path.⁴⁸ Again the school was reflecting the emphasis in some mainstream grammar schools, while in addition demonstrating a desire to go outside the traditional view of blind musicians; boys would increasingly be encouraged to play instruments in order to encourage their cultural development, but for most this would not have any sort of academic emphasis.⁴⁹

The 1955 inspection also highlighted issues with some academic subjects. There was criticism of the lack of experimental work in Science. For the younger years, the emphasis was upon demonstrations carried out and described by the teaching staff.⁵⁰ General Science was taught up to School Certificate and 'O' Level, but students were deterred from doing advanced Science. A student of the war years, who was to train to teach Science later on in his teaching career, was made to do History.⁵¹ A scientific bent and dexterity was seen as necessary for Physiotherapy and encouraged, but there was no effective school route for those whose scientific interests were not medical. In 1956, a student who wished to do 'A' Level Physics was told it was 'inadvisable' and another student did manage to do Chemistry for 'O' Level, but then went to the local Technical College to do Physics because the school laboratory was 'not equipped' to do any more than General Science.⁵² The latter boy ended up going to a Technical College in his home area in order to do 'A' levels, as a preliminary to work in a research laboratory.⁵³



Illustration 9-A: Pupil setting up a basic electrical circuit in Science, with a 'Stainsby' braille ready for writing down results.

Worcester College was slow to adapt to the priorities for a more technical education which were emerging in the post-war world, but Bradnack was not alone in his adherence to older educational values as High Wycombe grammar school, another school with a strong classical course, caused the HMI 'serious misgivings' by allowing those studying a predominantly linguistic course to do virtually no Science after their first year.⁵⁴ Such attitudes were also to have an impact on Mathematics. The old grammar school assumptions of the separate nature of a classical and scientific education had led to narrow expectations of ability. Three students who were encouraged in the mid-1940s to do Greek were allowed to drop Mathematics (one on the grounds that they were already able to do all they would need, and the others because they had got as far as they were able). In fact, this was to prove to be a misjudgement on Bradnack's part as it was later realised that they

would need the subject at 'O' Level and one of the students was able to successfully cram the subject in a year.⁵⁵

By the later 1940s, students did have to offer Mathematics but students would appear to have been deterred from pursuing advanced study.⁵⁶ In 1951, the first student with no sight gained Higher Certificate, but there was perceived to be a problem with the general delivery of the subject; the Chairman of Governors expressed his concern at the fact that the only three candidates failed their 'O' Level in Mathematics in 1952, a year in which eleven students passed English Language.⁵⁷ A Head Boy was to say that only in Mathematics was the average 'below that of a normal school'.⁵⁸ The teacher was still Bonham and, although he was considered good at passing on 'his clarity of thought' to older students, he had never been formally trained. In the late 1950s, there was an assessment that his teaching did not encourage independent thinking so he was sent on a Ministry course, and another teacher was timetabled to help with the younger boys.⁵⁹

To a great extent, there were obstacles facing teachers of Mathematics which could explain some of the problems experienced by all special schools for the blind. In 1952, there was speculation that the failures could have been the result of raised standards or a lack of the technical apparatus required. The need for more discussion with Examination Boards to ensure effective modification of questions was also mentioned.⁶⁰ The limited additional time allowance of fifty per cent must also have caused difficulties given the number of diagrams which needed assessing.⁶¹ In addition, there remained the practical problem of being unable to read workings without removing the sheet of paper. The only upright braille available was the Pyke-Glauser, as the Perkins Braille did not come over to the United Kingdom until much later in the 1950s and into the 1960s [Appendix A].



WORCESTER COLLEGE FOR THE BLIND.

A CLASSROOM IN THE NEW WING.

Illustration 9-B: Mathematics lesson c. 1939. The student at the front is using a Taylor Frame.⁶²

The conduct of the examination boards and the lack of understanding sometimes shown by the HMI added to the difficulties faced by Worcester College when delivering Science. The unwillingness of Examination Boards to make any concessions with regard to Science became obvious in 1955 when no additional time allowance was given for a Chemistry paper.⁶³ When the inspectors visited in 1955, they did show a general appreciation of what Worcester was attempting to do, but they did not appear to appreciate the College's perception of the need to compete on a level of 'normality'. They did not recognise the significance of the constraints with which the school was dealing, reporting in their comments on the Science curriculum:

A thoroughly satisfactory and practical course for blind boys must be extremely difficult to devise and virtually impossible if it is harnessed to the normal examination requirements.⁶⁴

Their solution was for a sound practical course to be devised at the college with the approval of the professional bodies who would need to give an exemption for future courses (presumably Physiotherapy).⁶⁵ The problem was that this would require special allowances to be made and would go against the philosophy of the Worcester College students performing on a par with their sighted contemporaries.

In spite of these problems, the College was being pioneering amongst special schools in pursuing developments with the goal of offering a full curriculum to the blind. The range of teaching resources was being extended. Herbert Clarke, the Deputy Headmaster, taught Science as well as Geography. He was exploring methods of presenting geographical information tactually.⁶⁶ In Science, efforts were being made to get students more involved in the lessons, as Illustration 9-A demonstrates. Sixth Formers who had gained their School Certificate or sufficient Ordinary Levels, and were waiting until they were old enough to enter the NIB Physiotherapy school, were encouraged to conduct experiments.⁶⁷

Worcester's role in advancing the delivery of Mathematics to the blind was promoted. The school prospectus showed a Mathematics lesson (Illustration 9-B) taught by Bonham, who had created the trigonometry board described in Chapter Four, and was contributing to the Mathematics Sub-Committee of the British Uniform Type Committee. He compiled the drafts for discussion and the final presentation which led to the adoption of a completed

Mathematics code in 1954. This allowed the analytical side of Mathematics to be handled by blind pupils and led to the production of textbooks in all the main areas of Mathematics, including Advanced Algebra, Geometry and Trigonometry.⁶⁸ This was important in enabling the development of future curriculum opportunities for the blind as Braille users could now more easily advance in the subject on a par with their mainstream counterparts.

Beyond these initiatives, there were adaptations for individual needs which suggest that the criticism of the failure of some staff to make adjustments was not general. To some extent, the school promoted the idea that all the issues related to a visual impairment had been dealt with at the primary schools for the blind.⁶⁹ As shown in the last chapter, the entrance examination expected students to demonstrate a command of Braille, but there was some flexibility and recognition that skills could vary according to individual circumstances; there was supporting work in Form III and reading classes for those below a minimum reading speed.⁷⁰

As has been shown in Chapter Six to have been the case at Chorleywood, boys with some sight were expected to work in Braille. In his second year, Adrian, who was to become a physicist using print for all of his working life, persuaded his parents to buy a magnifying glass which he had found helped him. He had to continue to work in Braille as the reaction of the college was, "It's all right for you to have it if you promise not to use it for more than 20 minutes per day".⁷¹ There was also some recognition of the need for students to develop the ability to type so that they would be able to cope at university or in work. Typing was highlighted in an article written about the school in which Illustration 9-C was included, but again the attitude of the school leadership shows ambivalence in the face of the need to be achieving the 'Triumph Over Affliction' referred to in the title of the article.⁷² The

lessons were conducted by a visiting teacher outside the school day for students who volunteered for tuition; the regular school timetable had to be seen to follow that of mainstream grammar school boys, with no concessions made.⁷³ Most students took typing lessons as a result of, what John has described as, a high level of vocational awareness amongst the students.⁷⁴ Given the society of the time, no allowances were expected to be made, so the students were aware of the need to be able to communicate. Other students were taught Braille shorthand, which was useful for those going on to the Commercial Colleges, but also for those aiming at university study.



Illustration 9-C: A typing lesson taking place outside the school day.⁷⁵

The school was contributing to advances which were being made in the teaching of Mathematics and Science to the blind, and the College's response to the external pressures placed by the HMI and examination boards runs counter to the claims of historians such as

Borsay that special school pupils were placed in a position of inferiority by their education.⁷⁶ The endeavours of Worcester staff were creating an awareness that blind students could tackle the common curriculum, but in ensuring that there was academic validation, other skills were sidelined. Attempting to compete as a grammar school at a time when external bodies, and society as a whole, were unwilling to make modifications did create some problems as well as opportunities, and again some of the weaknesses should be judged in the context of mainstream grammar school education.

9.3 Expanding Career Paths?

The school's goals and the levels of success in allowing students to integrate into adult society can to some extent be evaluated through an examination of their future careers. Although some students may have achieved later successes despite the special school, immediate destinations can provide an indication of the school's role.⁷⁷ As had been the case in the inter-war period, the school was aiming towards 'white-collar' employment, conforming to expectations of appropriate destinations for grammar school boys. An examination of occupations in the immediate post-war years indicates that the opportunities offered to boys at Worcester College were extending and were greater than those for other blind students or for the girls of Chorleywood College. However, the extension in opportunities, described in Chapter Seven as having been caused by wartime, did not lead to a confidence that a range of new sources of employment or advancement would be available. Bradnack and the Governors were still working to enable, while remaining aware that the prejudices of society were restricting prospects and adding to the difficulties the boys would face when integrating into adult life.

When Bradnack spoke to academically-able students in the immediate post-war years, he assumed they would follow one of the same three careers described in Chapter Four as favoured for students in the inter-war years – the Church, the Law and Physiotherapy.⁷⁸ However, society and the home background of many boys were altering so that fewer saw the Church as a vocation.⁷⁹ Only two students were to make their faith the basis of a career, and, for one of these, it was primarily as a lecturer rather than a minister.⁸⁰ By the 1950s, the growth of clerical employment, as well as the changed nature of the social aspiration of some students and their parents, meant that Bradnack had replaced the Church with Shorthand-typing in his list of possibilities.⁸¹

Opportunities for the blind were certainly available in Physiotherapy, and this was the preferred route to a future career. Physiotherapy remained a secure destination for any student who had gained four subjects, including General Science and English language at 'O' Level, as long as their physique and eye condition were not perceived to be a problem.⁸² Of those whose career path can be tracked, more than twice the number followed this route as took any other option.⁸³ After 1947, the opportunities available were extended when the Chartered Society allowed blind physiotherapists to take the Teachers' Certificate. The principal of the NIB School stated in 1952:

There is a shortage of physiotherapists and teachers, and blind persons undertaking this training can feel certain of an opportunity to earn their living and of making a useful contribution to society.⁸⁴

The *British Journal of Nursing* was positive in its assessment of the role of blind people who had gone into Physiotherapy.

Careful selection of the right type of student and a high standard of qualification have certainly helped to establish the present reputation of the blind practitioner, who, besides enjoying the prospect of a fine career, has the satisfaction of being able to serve the public with his or her skill.⁸⁵

Interviews would seem to suggest that those who went onto this career path worked successfully in hospitals and private practice.

As a grammar school, Worcester College remained focused on the goal of a university education. However, with ninety per cent of the places at Oxford reserved for those returning from war service, more students were to attend the provincial universities, such as Manchester, Liverpool and Reading, which were rapidly expanding to become more national in their intake.⁸⁶ The boys of Worcester did benefit from the way in which the school could use personal contacts and some of the old 'public school' elitism remained in the attitudes of dominant individuals. Bradnack was able to use personal influence, and the position of Theodore Tylor as a tutor, to get students into Oxford, although his personal lack of organization resulted in students being entered late which caused some problems.⁸⁷

As was the case before the war, more Worcester students studied the Law than nearly all other degree subjects added together.⁸⁸ Legal study did provide status and a clear career direction. In fact, able students sometimes felt pressured into applying for law, to the extent that one student decided on a change of degree course in the holiday before going up to Oxford, and was able to change to Classics after meeting with the head of his College.⁸⁹

Bradnack expressed his concern at this in a letter to the Rector, as he perceived that ‘the future of a successful Law student is clear: for a successful Greats student – well there is just no evidence’.⁹⁰ This was despite the success of a student who had read Classics at Reading University. The student himself was told that a degree could provide the ‘proof of a good mind’ needed for many jobs, but warned that the problem would be in convincing employers of this fact.⁹¹ Another of the students pushed into Law, perhaps inappropriately, was less successful and was to end up dropping out of university.⁹²

Again, as in the pre-war period, the selected careers route for jurisprudence students was that of the solicitor. This was a result of direction rather than always student choice, and the role of blind men in providing guidance for the teenage blind remains as evident as the earlier chapters have shown it to have been in the inter-war period. The Lawyers’ panel, led by Tylor, had considerable influence. When a student spoke to the Panel on the subject of advocacy, he was told that this would be very difficult for a blind man.⁹³ The example of Clifford Mortimer, who had gone blind in adulthood, did not make a precedent for others, because there was still perceived to be the problem of getting the briefs into an accessible form.⁹⁴

Tylor and Bradnack were both born at the turn of the twentieth century and had chosen their career paths by the middle of the 1920s. They had a tendency towards being conservative in their view of what was possible, but there were practical considerations behind the advice that was given. The school Governors, and particularly Tylor, brought up the issue of poor prospects for graduates in 1944 and 1945, by which time there was a call for the NIB to appoint a Placement Officer for ‘Professional careers’.⁹⁵ Bradnack’s concern was that the career prospects for those taking other subjects did appear to remain

limited in extent right into the late 1950s. Some students were dissuaded from doing a degree if the employment prospects were poor and both Bradnack and a County Chief Education Officer blocked the path of one student who wanted to pioneer a way in Social Studies, because they felt he did not have the determination and initiative.⁹⁶ Another who had considerable linguistic ability was persuaded of the difficulties of finding suitable graduate employment.⁹⁷

One of the options that the potential linguist did consider was teaching, but the limited number of special schools teaching languages to examination level put him off, and this view would have been reinforced by Bradnack who admitted that he did his 'utmost to discourage my pupils from aspiring to enter the teaching profession'.⁹⁸ The problem was that the headmasters of many mainstream schools retained negative perceptions. One wrote questioning whether a candidate asking for a reference had sufficient sight to teach English and Geography as well as Music.⁹⁹ The Ministry of Education was hardly encouraging. When discussing two students who were considering teaching in 1946, Bosworth Smith felt that, before a blind student entered a university course, they should be 'told quite plainly that his chances of securing a teaching post ... are very slight'. It was suggested that, while a small number could be employed in special schools and mainstream secondary schools, 'we should strongly deprecate their employment in primary schools for sighted pupils'. Also the students here suffered from the pressures on training after the war, when priority was given to ex-servicemen and women, so that the acceptance of a blind candidate in a training college would result in the 'exclusion of a sighted candidate who would, *prima facie*, be more likely to render good service in the schools'.¹⁰⁰

Despite the obstacles which remained, there were some indications of progress for blind boys. There were students who found that other degree subjects could be a path to a high-flying career. Boys were able to gain opportunities that will be shown in the next chapter to have been largely unavailable for the girls at the time. John Beasley Sharp took a Politics and Economics degree at Reading University and was to receive a CBE for his work as an Assistant Secretary in the Civil Service. Paul Crunden-White became a Senior Lecturer at the Royal Northern College of Music and Gerald Nussbaum was to lecture in Classics at Keele. Another was to become an antiquarian book-seller, after working in Braille transcription for a few years.¹⁰¹

It would appear that, where a student showed determination to follow an alternative route, there were possibilities, and the element of chance appeared less than for those exceptions described in Chapter Four. The two Worcester College students did go on to teach in mainstream secondary schools.¹⁰² When a student did qualify, Bradnack was supportive in his references:

when I find a boy who continues to wish to enter it in spite of all I can do to dissuade him so that it appears that he had really some 'vocation' for it, then if he is in other ways suitable in my judgement, I give him every encouragement in my power. [Name omitted] was such a boy, and I am more than glad that he is seeking a teaching post.¹⁰³

When a former student qualified as a primary school teacher, he was mentioned amongst those singled out for their achievements in the headmaster's report at Speech Day; a

distinction felt by the man who considered the staff had failed to motivate him at school which had led to his failure to take School Certificate.¹⁰⁴

Although Worcester College gave no formal careers advice, some former students did go directly into employment from school. A couple of students were able to join their parents' businesses, in dairy farming and a confectionery shop and tobacconists. However, most now had to make their own way, and some were able to pursue new paths. A radio enthusiast gained a job with Rank Bush Murphy. He worked in electronic fault finding, using equipment he adapted for his own needs; after ten years he appeared to be set to get involved in electronic equipment development.¹⁰⁵ Other students were to go to Technical Colleges to do courses in hotel work and horticulture; detailed correspondence took place on the type of horticulture which would be most appropriate, given the nature of the student's medical condition, before he went for a year's work-experience as preparation for a training course.¹⁰⁶ Another was to work for Boosey and Hawkes as a brass instrument tuner. Traditional routes for the blind, such as piano-tuning, were taken by two students who went to the Royal Normal College.

The broader class base of students resulted in other changes in career paths from those of the inter-war years. There was an increased willingness to send students into the lower middle class clerical occupations which had dominated the employment of sighted grammar school boys before the war.¹⁰⁷ The major route for those perceived as less academic was into shorthand and telephony. Some students transferred to the Royal Normal College for this, but others stayed on until they went off to one of the NIB/RNIB Commercial Colleges. As many students are recorded as going off to these colleges as read Law at University.

From this vocational training, the students seem to have found employment in local government offices. The goal was to find a 'steady, permanent job', and the school promoted the idea that this should be in a 'white-collar' occupation, which conferred middle class status.¹⁰⁸ The fact that these positions were pensionable also led to pressure to stay in public service.¹⁰⁹ There was the hope that once a young man could establish himself, he would be able to gain additional qualifications and advance in seniority.¹¹⁰ Jackson, in his study of *The Middle Classes*, has claimed that the majority of local authority secondary school leavers were 'obliged to endure years of dull and often humiliating' clerical work.¹¹¹ However, after a few years opportunities for promotion to work 'more equal to their abilities' would appear for most young adults, whereas the difficulty for the former students of Worcester College was in obtaining the prospect of future advancement.¹¹² One parent was to complain that the handworkers at Henshaw's workshops for the blind were paid more than a stenographer, and later in the 1960s, one former student of the Bradnack years was exploring alternative prospects as he found telephony 'unrewarding, monotonous and fatiguing', and the money insufficient to support his wife and three children.¹¹³ Some of the former Worcester boys took the risk and advantageously changed their career path. The student who had a talent in Languages was to become a computer programmer, as did several of his peers who had initially trained in shorthand.¹¹⁴ Another did a Sociology Diploma while working and was to move into social work.¹¹⁵

Discrimination by employers remained an obstacle for the blind. The Regional Supervisor for the North Regional Association for the Blind was to complain in 1950 that, when work in industry could be acquired, the sighted employer showed no willingness to 'upgrade the

young blind employee both in his work and in his wages'.¹¹⁶ Rose in her book on *The Development of Blind Welfare* could still comment in 1970 that,

it is, for obvious reasons, much harder for a blind employee to change jobs or to win promotion. It is still a case of fitting a blind man in. 'When I go for an interview', said a well-qualified professional man, 'I don't feel that because I have the right qualifications I will automatically get the job.'¹¹⁷

When John Wall qualified as a solicitor in 1954, he applied for around four hundred jobs, gaining fifty-three interviews and two offers of work.¹¹⁸ He was later to become the first blind man appointed to the Judiciary, having been turned down twenty years' earlier due to the judgement of the Lord Chamberlain's Department that he would not be able to observe the demeanour of a witness.¹¹⁹ Wall would not have been helped in the early 1970s by the opposition of Theodore Tylor and Rupert Cross, former students and Oxford dons in Jurisprudence, to the suggestion made by a Royal Commission that the blind could sit on juries.¹²⁰

A study of the restricted chances of employment and promotion available does demonstrate the need to separate the role of the special school from the other difficulties which were holding the 'disabled' back. Bradnack was frustrated by many of the problems faced by former students. When the Headmaster wrote to an Education Officer, about a student who was 'honest, reliable and trustworthy, and of a friendly and accessible disposition', he stated that it 'causes me to despair of the social and economic structure of a world that can find no use for thoroughly decent men who just lack something to make them economically

acceptable.’¹²¹ Bradnack and Worcester College were attempting to provide opportunities in the circumstances of the post-war world. Sometimes this was far from easy and resulted in a high level of caution, and a fear of the negative consequences of challenging the assumptions of society.

9.4 Enabling or Disabling?

Finding employment was important to the position and self-worth of the blind but there were broader skills linked to extra-curricular experience which were required to completely ‘enable’ the boys for adult life. Segregation in any special school has been assumed to have deprived young people of a ‘social education’, so that they have been left unprepared to look after themselves independently and to integrate fully into society.¹²² Despite what will be shown of the limitations of the education and social environment he provided, Bradnack was aware of the broader role which the College needed to fulfil in order for the young men to be enabled as citizens.¹²³ He asserted that, ‘what we seek to do for boys is to train their minds, and to send them out more adaptable than when they came to us, and more understanding of life and of the world’.¹²⁴ While Bradnack’s thinking involves a ‘Victory over Blindness’, which was to be achieved by ignoring rather than confronting some of the difficulties which former students would face in integrating into society, by promoting ‘confidence and self-reliance’ the Headmaster was aiming to move his students outside perceptions of disability.¹²⁵

Dependency was certainly not part of the image the school was promoting. The *Picture Post* article of 1945 claimed that the school was ‘against sympathy in favour of active effort’.¹²⁶ Bradnack viewed education as preparing the boys to become active members of the community. He had been a notable figure in the history of his previous school, Dean

Close in Cheltenham, due to his efforts to encourage a sense of civic responsibility through his establishment of the 'Pioneers', a voluntary organisation whose members did practical work to improve school amenities.¹²⁷ At Worcester, too, the Headmaster was encouraging independence and an ability to take a role in society. The attitude within the school seems to have been positive. The establishment of the legislature, as a kind of school council, was meant to give the boys a sense of decision-making. There was a staff veto but students could comment on the rules, and were able to request that the rules should be written down to reduce a sense of arbitrary control.¹²⁸ Students were also allowed some management of the monies available through Governors' grant for the administration of the clubs. During the war, the 'Useful Services Association' was set up to encourage the boys to carry out jobs such as shovelling coal.¹²⁹

Even after the war, the inspectors felt that the boys were being prepared effectively:

The importance of general social training within the School and the value of establishing and maintaining contacts with the outside sighted world in which the boys will eventually have to live are both fully realised.¹³⁰

The inspectors also considered that the school under Bradnack was able to 'equip them to deal competently with the practical and psychological problems that are due to blindness'.¹³¹ The headmaster was praised for an approach to blindness which neither 'over-emphasises nor discounts'.¹³² The attitude encouraged was positive, with one student writing in the school magazine of the need to make 'a serious attempt to make the very best of what blindness may offer'.¹³³

However, the approach was one that tended to deny rather than accept and work with difference. The 1955 Inspectors actually claimed that the 'philosophy of normality was perhaps being overdone'.¹³⁴ Bradnack appears to have been a man of his time, having a very negative view of the 'Blind' as a 'second rate' group, and therefore wanting the boys of Worcester to compete as 'normal' in order to gain a higher status.¹³⁵ His attitude was unforgiving, and the emphasis of the distinction system used in History was 'to expect from each boy perhaps just a little more than the best that he can give'.¹³⁶

The manner in which Bradnack ignored the issue of blindness was actually seen by the most critical of the former students as a positive, as the boys were not assumed to be unable to do things. He was not tied by the definition of 'disability' which Barton and Tomlinson have described as holding students back. Equally his approach was not the 'normalization' described by French, and discussed in Chapter One, but was one of encouraging an arrogant disregard. The aim was one of enabling the students to achieve academically and in their adult lives. However, the approach of the College to issues surrounding blindness created its own problems, in the view of other students. Peter White has claimed that:

Worcester came up with a solution to the problem peculiarly its own. Rather than eradicate these odd quirks, it filled us with so much braying self-confidence that most of us emerged finding it difficult to believe that anything we did could be regarded as less than totally admirable.¹³⁷

White only arrived at the school in 1958, shortly after Richard Fletcher had taken over as the headteacher, but the teaching staff had not changed and interviews with other students demonstrate a perception of similar issues.

Other former students have been critical of the lack of pastoral care.¹³⁸ Perhaps aware of the criticisms made by Cutsforth, described in Chapter Seven, Bradnack did claim that he was trying to create some sort of 'home' situation within the school. This was probably part of the reason behind his establishment of the Houses. At Dean Close, a former student was to assert that a 'housemaster became the House father', and Bradnack at Worcester seems to have tried to get a team including the matron and housekeeper, who, as they were of an 'appropriate social status', could contribute to the school being a 'home in as real a sense as possible'.¹³⁹ However, there was no intention of creating a family atmosphere, and, for many of the young men on the staff, a marriage bar did effectively exist in the 1940s. One member of staff resigned on his marriage because of the requirement for a single man who could do residential duties.¹⁴⁰ Ramsay Baxter was told by Bradnack that he would have preferred a resident bachelor, but, in the summer of 1945 with staffing shortages remaining an issue, and with his willingness to bring his 'gipsy caravan' with him to house his family in the school grounds, he was appointed.¹⁴¹ By the late 1940s, the position of resident master was taken by a bachelor, the History master, Leslie Downes. Bradnack sent his own sons away to school and was not seen as having an affinity with children, so perhaps he was unaware that neither the existence of the resident master nor the House system gave students an adult with whom they could easily discuss their problems.¹⁴² This was a critical failing of a school in which boys lacked regular contact with home. Without even a half-term break, students did not see their parents for

months at a time; a result partly of transport difficulties but also of a boarding school culture amongst the elite in society which saw the experience as character building.¹⁴³

Former students were aware of the lack of a broader preparation for life, and some now reflect that this created difficulties in their later lives. For some, the fact that they were taught nothing about forming emotional relationships was a weakness. They were given some sex education, but, even at the time, some former students must have commented that there was insufficient guidance, and this resulted in a discussion at a staff meeting of 1957 on 'Physical Fitness'; however, the decision of the staff was to take no further action.¹⁴⁴ This was a society in which grammar schools did not see this as necessary but the school was failing to appreciate its role in *loco parentis* for much of the year.

An additional gap in preparation for adult life was the lack of any training for domestic skills. Bradnack expected that students arriving at the school should be able to dress themselves and clean their teeth in twenty minutes.¹⁴⁵ The only task they then had to complete was making their own beds. The reluctance to acquire additional skills came as much from the students. The legislature met in 1947 to protest against the new duty of collecting clean linen on a Saturday afternoon. This was accepted but on condition that no similar tasks be 'imposed'.¹⁴⁶ Again the College's priorities fitted in with the curriculum of public and grammar schools for boys which did not acknowledge any need to provide training in any such domestic skills.¹⁴⁷ There may have been fewer maids in middle class homes, but there was still an expectation that a wife would be dealing with domestic chores.¹⁴⁸

Although the inspectors claimed that spare time was filled, students were offered a limited range of activities and clubs. Chess and contract bridge were available, along with a Meccano club, but there was little supervision for much of the evening and weekend.¹⁴⁹ This did add to the difficulties of being away from home for some students, and the lack of regular, and independent, social contact with outsiders was considered by some to have led to an immaturity in the students.¹⁵⁰ White has commented that he and his peers 'carried on with our eccentric ways unmolested'.¹⁵¹

However, for other former students, the fact that little was organised outside the school day was positive, as the level of freedom in itself gave responsibility.¹⁵² They were taught to be independent and could pursue their personal interests. Some of the activities encouraged did help to develop social skills. Although rowing was not as significant as it once was in the philosophy of the school, it remained important as a useful skill which brought many former students fellowship when integrated with the sighted world. Also, the practice of inviting girls from the local grammar schools to dances was continued, providing some opportunity, even though heavily regulated, to break out of the isolation of the single-sex environment.

Despite the limited nature of contacts with the outside world, there was certainly no sign of the 'incarceration' which Jenny Morris has seen in French's description of her time at the Brighton school.¹⁵³ Students were sent out on a daily basis for a walk without any training or supervision. The freedom they were given did lead to two accidents and, in the modern world of Health and Safety Risk Assessments, the unsupervised walks can appear an example of negligence, but the experience has been described as positive by most students

interviewed. They relished the opportunity it provided to be independent and the lack of supervision which gave the opportunity to explore personal interests.

However, one former student felt that the use of sticks would have been useful for the people of Worcester, as well as encouraging better habits for the future.¹⁵⁴ Illustration 9-D was professionally taken and showed four of the boys on the school drive. Interestingly one of them was carrying a stick. Former students recalled this boy's choice to hold a stick as more of a reflection of the eccentricity of his personality rather than a wish to assist with mobility.¹⁵⁵ Earlier in the century Pearson had considered that he walked more 'naturally' without a stick and, despite the increase in traffic, students were still being encouraged to depend solely on the use of their hearing and other senses to detect obstacles.¹⁵⁶

This was an era when mobility training had not been properly developed in the United Kingdom.¹⁵⁷ The *Handbook for School Teachers of the Blind* talked about encouraging a 'travelling technique', but only mentioned that 'Play-acting on the stage is invaluable to develop the blind child's sense of direction and to help him memorise location'.¹⁵⁸ Bradnack was reputed to have told students travelling for interview at the physiotherapy school on getting to the underground station, to 'stand on the platform and look helpless'.¹⁵⁹ Although, the boys could go into Worcester, the lack of training to cope in the city meant that most tended to rely on those with some sight.

The failure to properly consider mobility needs did prevent the development of a practical approach to challenges which presented themselves, and certainly provided an obstacle which many of them had to surmount later in order to be independent in later life. There were indications in the late 1950s that a more reasoned approach would be needed.

Research was done by a university researcher at the school on obstacle detection, with the emphasis being on how many were able to identify a rebounding echo.¹⁶⁰ Most former students were later to do long cane training.

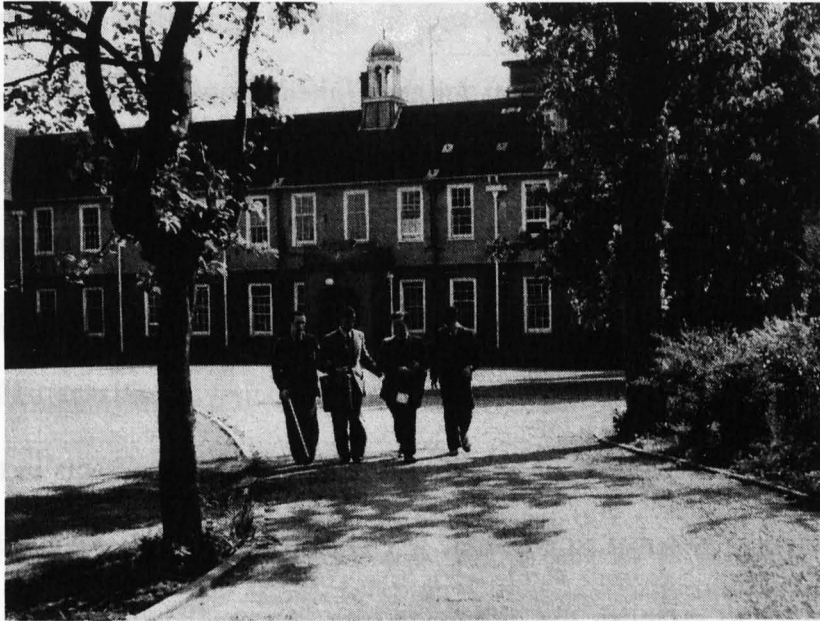


Illustration 9-D: Boys walking down the school drive, 1948.¹⁶¹

Some of the weaknesses in the development of social skills did mean that the jump into the outside world presented difficulties. Sighted young people could experience problems with the transition to higher education and employment, but particular problems were identified. A former student wrote in the school magazine of the 'deep gulf between the comparatively ordered life of the last months at school, and the world outside. There, one is flung at short notice to make a living in competition with others having wider experience of the troubles encountered by seeking to do something more than just keep alive.'¹⁶² John recalled the misery of the first Oxford term where he had problems integrating.¹⁶³

Despite initial difficulties, most students did adjust and were able to take a responsible role in the society of the time. John Wall became the first blind man to be made a Judge, as well as becoming Chairman of the Royal National Institute for the Blind and President of the European Blind Union; he received a knighthood for his work. Another solicitor was to go on to become mayor of his local town in Shropshire.¹⁶⁴ Many other former students were active in the Braille Association for the United Kingdom, as well as in the local associations for the blind.

Contrary to the broader criticisms which have been made of special schools, Worcester College was preparing its students to play a role in society as citizens. However, there were weaknesses in the preparation for life provided by special schools in the 1940s and 1950s. The problem was that an academic grammar school model of education was being followed in order to establish the difference from the secondary modern and technical education for the blind, but this did lead to a failure to confront issues relating to skills for day-to-day living.

9.5 Summary

The change to becoming a grammar school did keep Worcester College at the forefront of many 'enabling' developments in the education of blind children. The College was not preparing its students for a 'devalued social role' in the manner Barnes would suggest was typical of special schools, but was helping to provide the qualifications and independence needed to facilitate the assimilation of its students into society as economically independent and active citizens.¹⁶⁵ Many of the former students interviewed would agree with the suggestion of a Worcester boy in 1945 that the academic curriculum was succeeding in 'blunting ... the effect of the disadvantages of blindness' to produce 'all the

achievements'.¹⁶⁶ By providing access to the middle classes, this group of blind boys was being given advantages far beyond those available to most of their peers left behind in the secondary modern schools for the blind

Nevertheless, Worcester College cannot be seen simply as an example of 'humanitarian progress' after the 1944 Education Act. The pursuit of achievable academic goals did produce its own limitations both in the curriculum and the consideration of social and domestic skills. Bradnack was not always working as a positive example of individual agency. He seems to have had a hard and inflexible approach to the needs of young people and a lack of sympathy in his attitude to the position of the blind as a group.

However, Bradnack was seeking to advance the Worcester boys in an era when the opportunities presented by society to 'handicapped' groups had not really expanded much beyond those discussed in Chapter Four. Worcester College was primarily concerned about its status amongst grammar schools rather than transforming society, but no individual establishment could transform mores. Until government and voters were prepared to 'transform' the position of the 'disabled', promoting opportunities in a few fields for its own students was perhaps the best which could be achieved. At least, boys were able to utilise the advantages which class could provide, whereas the girls, to be discussed in the next chapter, were also hindered by gender.

9.6 References

¹ French, *Oral History*, 360, 411..

² See Ch. 1.5.

³ P. Longmore, *Why I Burned my Book and other essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 48.

⁴ Borsay, *Disability*, 116.

⁵ White, 90.

⁶ 'The Blind Boys' Public School,' *Picture Post*, 26/5/1945, 17.

⁷ The grammar schools were expected by parents to offer the academic courses which provided access to middle class occupations, and this helped to create a continuing influence for the public school model. Banks, 202, 220.

⁸ Inspection WCB 1955, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Chapter 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See Chapter 3.4. In 1948, the Governors agreed to appoint two additional masters to enable more teaching for advanced students. WCB Gov Mins, 19/3/1948.

¹³ Interview David.

¹⁴ Interview Mike.

¹⁵ Interview David.

¹⁶ Ministry of Education Inspection Reports on High Wycombe Royal Grammar School, Feb. 1949, and Aylesbury Grammar School, Feb. 1953. ED162/221, ED162/57 NA.

¹⁷ *Pimpernel* and *The New Beacon*, 1930-54: Student files, NCW.

¹⁸ Inspection WCB 1955, minutes of a meeting with the Governing Body, 1, ED195/99 NA. No similar comments were made in a selection of inspections examined for mainstream girls', boys' or co-educational grammar schools.

¹⁹ Interview Mark.

²⁰ Interview Paul: emails from Sir John Wall to author.

²¹ Letter from Bradnack to University tutor, Student files, NCW.

²² WCB magazines, 1950s.

²³ WCB School magazines: Governors' Mins. One student had gained School Certificate before he had arrived at the College.

²⁴ Inspection High Wycombe GS, 2.

²⁵ Ministry of Education Inspection Report Luton Grammar School May 1955, 2. ED162/57 NA.

²⁶ Interview Bill.

²⁷ WCB Gov Mins, 9/11/1951.

²⁸ Interviews John, Mike, Paul, Richard.

²⁹ Drake, 41.

³⁰ see 1.1.

³¹ Inspection WCB 1955, 6.

³² Interview Mark.

³³ Interview Bill.

³⁴ Inspection WCB, 1955, 6 and 8.

³⁵ J.A. Graham and B.A. Phythian (ed.), *The Manchester Grammar School 1515-1965* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), 128. Some grammar schools struggled to provide sufficient language texts or complete copies of the Bible for advanced level

study, but these issues are not described as being at the same level: Inspections High Wycombe GS, 6, and Aylesbury GS, 9: Inspection Report, 1955, 9.

³⁶ NCWFSA email forum, 29/7/2003.

³⁷ Inspection WCB 1955, 8, 6.

³⁸ Interviews John, Mike, Paul.

³⁹ WCB, Speech Day programme, 5/7/1952, 3/7/1953.

⁴⁰ Inspection WCB 1955, 9-11.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 9.

⁴² Inspection WCB 1955, 8 and 10.

⁴³ 'Literary and Debating Society Report, *Pimpernel* (1946): 23, (1952): 22: P.F. Tait, 'Why has Communism taken such a firm hold in Eastern Europe, as compared with the almost negligible results in Western Europe', *Pimpernel* (1948): 14.

⁴⁴ Inspection WCB 1955, minutes of a meeting with the Governing Body, 6.

⁴⁵ Inspection WCB 1955, 14: Graham and Phythian, 132: Inspection Report Windsor County Boys' School 10-13 Oct. 1961, 4, ED162/98 NA.

⁴⁶ Inspection WCB 1955, 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ Impression confirmed in informal discussion with Mark. A former student was given part-time work in the Music Department as a consequence of this inspection report.

⁴⁹ Newcastle upon Tyne Royal Grammar School was criticised in an inspection report of 1926 because Music was scarcely developed and there was no class teaching above Form III. B. Mains and A. Tuck, (ed.), *History of Royal Grammar School Newcastle-Upon-Tyne* (Stocksfield; Oriel, 1986), 198.

⁵⁰ Inspection WCB 1955, 12: Interview Mike.

⁵¹ Interview, Mike.

⁵² Minutes of staff meeting, 30/7/1956, FC2 NCW: Student files, 1956, NCW.

⁵³ Student files, NCW.

⁵⁴ Inspection High Wycombe GS, 5.

⁵⁵ Interview Bill.

⁵⁶ Before 1956 only the 'occasional boy' had success, Inspection Report, 12.

⁵⁷ WCB GovMins, 9/11/1951 and 24/10/1952.

⁵⁸ H.E.H. Davies, 'Windows for the Blind,' *Worcester Evening News*, 9 October 1957.

⁵⁹ Inspection WCB 1955, 11: WCB GovMins 27/2/1959.

⁶⁰ WCB GovMins 14/10/1952.

⁶¹ Interview David. Other subjects got an additional time allowance of ten minutes for each hour.

⁶² WCB prospectus, c.1939.

⁶³ Staff meeting Minutes, 15/12/1955, NCW.

⁶⁴ Inspection WCB 1955, 12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 12

⁶⁶ Inspection WCB 1955, 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12. Confirmed discussion with Ian Fell.

⁶⁸ R.W. Bonham, 'Mathematics at a Grammar School for the Blind,' in R. Fletcher ed., *Report to the Viscount Nuffield Auxiliary Fund, The Teaching of Mathematics and Science to the Blind* (London; RNIB, 1968), 55.

⁶⁹ 'Public School,' *Picture Post*, 1.

⁷⁰ Inspection WCB 1955, 7 and 11.

⁷¹ Email Adrian, Aug. 2005.

⁷² 'Worcester College Boys Triumph over Affliction,' issued by the Central Office of Information June 1954, RNIB.

⁷³ The time allowances for the subjects offered were in line with those of grammar schools, Inspection Report, 6.

⁷⁴ Interview John.

⁷⁵ Central Office of Information 6/54, photoD72288. B4, NCW.

⁷⁶ Borsay, *Disability*, 116.

⁷⁷ Interview, Mark.

⁷⁸ 'Another sense of Justice,' *Daily Telegraph*, 9/2/1991. According to a 1942 list of former students, 67 had gone into the Church, 37 into the Law and 30 into Massage, WCB Gov Mins 23/10/42.

⁷⁹ A more secular society had been developing in the inter-war period. Pugh, *Danced*, 7.

⁸⁰ Student files, NCW.

⁸¹ Interview David.

⁸² Report of comment by School of Massage for Blind Selection Board in letter by Bradnack, 3/6/1942, Student files.

⁸³ 26 followed this route from December 1945 to December 1954. Doc. 15 Further Education and after careers of Old Boys, 'Documents provided for H.M. Inspectors, 1 Jan. 1955,' SA NCW.

⁸⁴ J.O. Jenkins, *Pimpernel* (1952): 5.

⁸⁵ 'The National Institute for the Blind,' *British Journal of Nursing* 95 (1947): 9

⁸⁶ Doc 15, 'Documents provided 1 Jan. 1955'.

⁸⁷ This criticism, made in interview by Bill, is borne out in letters in personal files which refer to entrance examinations for colleges being missed. One student did his entrance examination in Modern Languages rather than Law as a consequence.

⁸⁸ Doc. 15, 'Documents provided 1 Jan. 1955'.

⁸⁹ Interview Bill.

⁹⁰ Letter by Bradnack, 3/9/1954, Student file.

⁹¹ The student was to have a successful career owning his own business, Student files.

⁹² Letter to R.C. Fletcher, 21/2/1965, Student file.

⁹³ Student files.

⁹⁴ Mortimer was reputed to have been helped by a 'prodigious memory', as well as a young counsel and the fact that his wife had special dispensation to sit behind him and assist with the Braille notes. Obituary, 'Mr. H. Clifford Mortimer: A Courageous and Able Counsel,' *The Times*, 2/10/1961.

⁹⁵ WCB Gov Mins, 9/10/1944, 6/7/1945.

⁹⁶ Letter by Bradnack to Nottinghamshire Director of Education, 30/6/1952.

⁹⁷ Interview with Richard.

⁹⁸ Letter 26/2/1951, student files.

⁹⁹ Letter, student files.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from N.D. Bosworth Smith to W.McG. Eagar, 14/5/1946, student file.

¹⁰¹ List of former students, WRO. Confirmed by conversations with former students.

¹⁰² Student files.

¹⁰³ Letter, 26/2/1951, Student files.

¹⁰⁴ Interview Mark.

¹⁰⁵ Report by A. Aston, Employment Officer cc. to R. Fletcher, 10/1/1968, student file.

¹⁰⁶ Letter 1944, student file.

¹⁰⁷ A. Jackson, *The Middle Classes* (Nairn: David St John Thomas, 1991), 18.

¹⁰⁸ Note of employment officer, 1947, in student file.

¹⁰⁹ Interview Richard: Copy of Letter from Education Officer, 21/11/1956, student file.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Bradnack to father of student, 3/6/1942, student file.

¹¹¹ Jackson, 181.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Letter from father of student to Bradnack, 28/7/1945: Letter to R.C. Fletcher, 21/2/1965.

Student files.

¹¹⁴ Interview Richard.

¹¹⁵ Interview David.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Regional Supervisor of North regional Association for the Blind, 5/4/1950, student file.

¹¹⁷ Rose, 52.

¹¹⁸ 'Another sense of Justice,' *Daily Telegraph*, 9/2/1991.

¹¹⁹ 'Blind lawyer appointed to the Judiciary,' *Daily Telegraph*, 2/2/1991.

¹²⁰ Interview John.

¹²¹ Letter by Bradnack to Education Officer, Wakefield, student file.

¹²² John Kenworthy and Joe Whitaker, 'Anything to Declare? The Struggle for Inclusive Education and Children's Rights,' *Disability & Society* 15 (2000): 219–231: Oliver, *Understanding*, 79.

¹²³ Prospectus, 1938.

¹²⁴ Student file 28/5/1943.

¹²⁵ Prospectus 1953.

¹²⁶ 'Public School', *Picture Post*.

¹²⁷ McNeile, 41. This was to include the creation of a Tuck Shop in former stables.

¹²⁸ Interview Bill.

¹²⁹ Interview Paul.

¹³⁰ Inspection WCB 1955, 16.

¹³¹ *Ibid*.

¹³² Inspection WCB 1955, 4.

¹³³ Gerald Nussbaum, *Pimpernel* (1946): 8.

¹³⁴ Inspection WCB 1955, minutes of a meeting with the Governing Body, 2.

¹³⁵ Unsigned document marked in pencil 'Return to Headmaster', describing the system for giving distinctions in the History department since 1939, B23 NCW.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*.

¹³⁷ White, 95.

¹³⁸ Interview David

¹³⁹ McNeile, 36: Unsigned notebook with Staff meeting minutes, FC21 NCW. The nature of the notes suggest they are written by Bradnack and the content would fit in with a brief summary given in the Staff Minutes of 28/4/1956, when the Headmaster gave an 'appreciation' of a course for heads of Special Boarding Schools.

¹⁴⁰ Dowell resigned, WCB Gov Mins, 2/3/1945.

¹⁴¹ R. Baxter, *Once Blind, Twice Sighted* (Malvern: Privately published, 2000), 53.

¹⁴² Interview and email David.

¹⁴³ 'Pimpernel Post-box II,' *Pimpernel* (1952): 10.

¹⁴⁴ Interview Bill: Staff meeting minutes, 21/9/1957, IV, NCW.

¹⁴⁵ Bradnack letter 27/7/1942, student file.

¹⁴⁶ *Pimpernel* (1947), 21.

¹⁴⁷ Evident in study of reports of mainstream grammar schools such as that in Luton, 26/5/1955, ED162/57 NA.

¹⁴⁸ James, 547.

¹⁴⁹ Inspection WCB 1955, 14.

¹⁵⁰ Comment by Mark who returned briefly to teach at the school.

¹⁵¹ White, 95.

¹⁵² Richard and Mark.

¹⁵³ J. Morris, *Encounters with Strangers Feminism and Disability* (London: the Women's Press, 1996), 3.

¹⁵⁴ Interview Richard.

¹⁵⁵ Comments made at the NCWFSA reunion, September 2007.

¹⁵⁶ Pearson, 91.

¹⁵⁷ The first guide dogs in the United Kingdom only completed their training in 1931. Long cane training began in the United States with the training of blinded Second World War veterans.

¹⁵⁸ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Handbook for School Teachers of the Blind* (Bristol: CTB, 1956), 116-7.

¹⁵⁹ Email NCWFSA.

¹⁶⁰ NCWFSA email forum, 10/4/2004: interview David.

¹⁶¹ Campbell's photographic studio, B4 NCW.

¹⁶² J. P. Correll, 'The Unsheltered Life,' *Pimpernel* (1948): 4.

¹⁶³ Interview, John.

¹⁶⁴ WRO Records.

¹⁶⁵ Barnes, 28.

¹⁶⁶ *Pimpernel* (1946): 8.

10. Chorleywood College as a Grammar School, 1944-58

Whereas the last two chapters on Worcester College have shown that individual agency was still playing a role alongside the broader influences of class and disability in special schools after the 1944 Education Act, an examination of Chorleywood also necessitates consideration of the continued impact of gender. Again there is a need to go beyond the assertions made by writers such as Tomlinson and Borsay that developments should be understood simply through a continuing desire for 'social control' which was now accompanied by rivalries between powerful educational and medical interests.¹ However, a study of Chorleywood into the post-war era does not show the continuity of educational experience generally assumed by traditional progressive writers, as well as in the oral history study of French.²

As was discussed in Chapter Seven, national policy after the 1944 Education Act confirmed Chorleywood College's status above other special schools as the one recognised grammar school for blind girls in England and Wales. With the LEAs now being given the responsibility for providing an appropriate education, this prestige did ensure that the school entered a time of security and expansion but this would not necessarily mean that external pressures lessened and removed the constraints which created the caution of Phyllis Monk. However, an examination of the impact of gender is once more necessary because, as Delamont has suggested, the 'double conformity', examined in Chapter Five, persisted so that no grammar school for girls was able to function in quite the same way as their counterparts for boys. The post-war years saw the 'last throes' of the concern for 'ladylike standards' in the grammar schools because of the 'staff's perceptions of the class background of the intake'.³ For the blind girls of Chorleywood, there would still be

constraints which could affect discussions on future careers.⁴ In attempting to assess the impact of external pressures, a study of Chorleywood College once more has to include comparison with similar girls' grammar and public boarding schools.

An examination of Chorleywood after 1945 forms an essential part of this thesis, not only because of the need to assess the impact of the new Education Act but also because of the debates relating to the long-term effect of the Second World War on the position of women. Armstrong's account of the 'messiness' affecting policies has highlighted the way in which the role which war played in opening opportunities for disabled women as well as the able-bodied has been largely forgotten and this has been highlighted in Chapter Seven.⁵ However, the effects were complex and historians assessing the role of gender have varied in their assessment of the impact of the Second World War. As will be explained in Section 4, Summerfield describes the three interpretative theses as transformation, continuity and polarization, and these will then be examined to explore the extent to which war had both positive and negative consequences for the position of females whether in a supervisory role or being educated in a grammar school.⁶

This chapter explores the continuities from the pre-war experience for the girls as well as the changes brought by war and the acquisition of the prestige of grammar school status. Sections 1 and 2 look at the implications of the implementation of the 1944 Education Act, and focus on a consideration of the impact of Government policy and the extent to which class continued to play a role in influencing special education. Again, as with Worcester College, the implications for the social background of the intake are assessed in the light of criticisms that selection processes in mainstream grammar schools were just perpetuating existing class divisions. The 'progress' from just doing good to some can only be judged

by assessing whether, just as at Worcester, there was an extension of the social background of the pupils to a slightly greater extent than in mainstream grammar schools.

Once these factors have been assessed, and the context established, this chapter then returns to the key area of debate, whether the consequences of this special education were 'disabling'. The existence of the opportunities to be gained from the acquisition of qualifications and cultural capital does raise the possibility that Chorleywood was preparing its girls to be adult citizens and was therefore continuing to play a pioneering role for the female blind. In such a way, the Chorleywood students, like those at Worcester, did not continue to be the same irrelevant elite who became the recipients of advantages which had no impact on others.

10.1 The Impact of National Policy on a Grammar School for Blind Girls

Chorleywood College's designation as the grammar school for blind girls marked a development of a trend that had started before the outbreak of war. As has been demonstrated in Chapter Five, during the 1930s LEAs had increased their level of funding for students at the College. The involvement of public bodies had changed some of the emphasis, and, thereby the nature, of the schooling, and this would be consolidated under the impact of the Butler Act. Nevertheless, there were continuities in the priorities of a middle-class academic education which, as during the inter-war years, were designed to parallel those of other higher status schools for girls and thus show that this school was superior to other special schools.

The emphasis on educating the blind in special schools, (discussed in Chapter Seven), along with Chorleywood's position as the grammar school for blind girls, did increase the

number of applications and ended the inter-war economic pressures. This enabled the school governors to tighten their admission procedures as well as expand, and this ended many of the problems which had restricted the curriculum and achievement in the inter-war years (see Chapter Six). The demand for places grew to the extent that, in 1953, there were twenty entrants for six places.⁷ With the school reaching sixty-seven pupils, seen as its maximum, Miss McHugh could now afford to be selective, sending girls to the Royal Normal College, or other non-grammar schools for the blind, if they did not meet new academic standards.⁸ Organisation was eased as, rather than having to mix year-groups, they could function as a one-stream grammar school. By 1949, they had sufficient numbers to organise each year into two classes, which were designated A and Alpha, but, as the students realised, were organised according to ability.⁹

As a consequence of the secured finances, many of the distractions of presentation and self-promotion evident in the inter-war period were removed. A decision was taken to end advertising in all but the *Girls' School Year Book*, as they recognised that 'such publicity was not now required'.¹⁰ The school was able to put increased emphasis on functionality rather than 'middle class' gentility, leaving behind the expense of fine china, and instead acquiring unbreakable 'plithnic' cups.¹¹ New buildings could also be more practical with the initial acquisition of Horsa-type huts and the building of an extension in the early 1950s.¹²

In the post-war era, the demands of presentation were different. Status was to be preserved by demonstrating the 'normality' of the grammar school education that was being delivered. The school prospectus pictured students in formal classroom environments without alternative methods of work obviously being used (see Illustration 10-A). The

emphasis upon academic procedures, rather than upon an elite *ambiance*, would now illustrate the differences between their students and those receiving a secondary modern education in the other special schools.

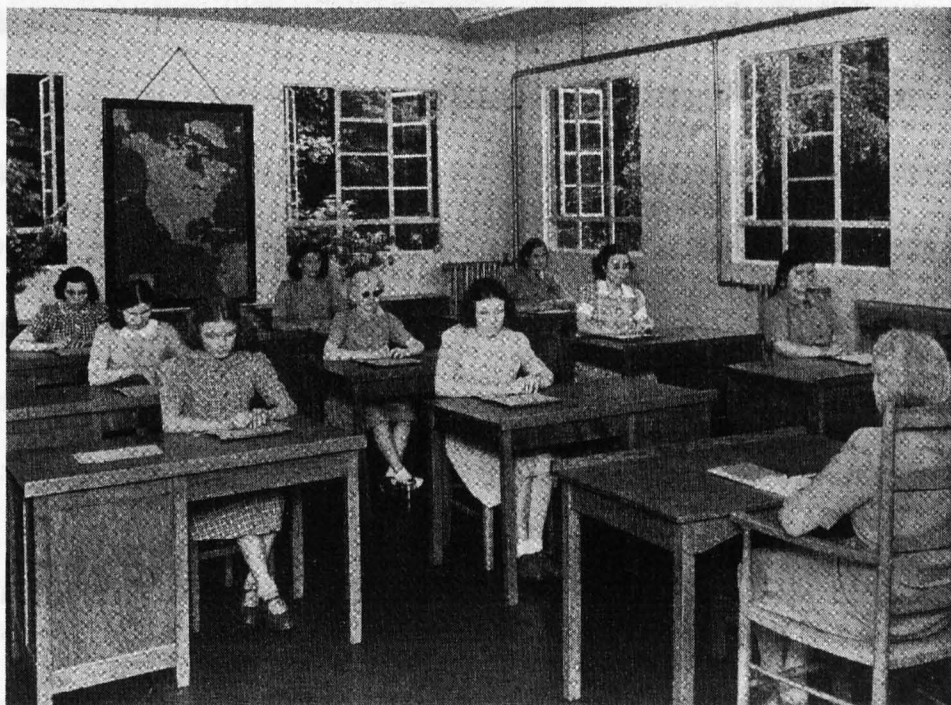


Illustration 10-A: A class at work, from the school prospectus c. 1950.

The Governors had asserted that Chorleywood's status should be confirmed by becoming a traditional-style academic grammar school, rejecting the initial suggestion of Mr Bosworth Smith of the Board of Education that the school should 'not be too strictly [a] grammar school and [should] provide a modern type education as well'.¹³ The Governors were opposed to any implication that they had a vocational emphasis, providing some commercial training as well, as this could suggest a link with the technical schools. The educational philosophy underlying most of the education provided had not changed greatly. The prospectus of 1950 showed similar aims to those of Miss Monk, but, as a consequence

of alterations in the intake and Ministry expectations, there was more of a focus on future employment:

It gives them a liberal education of public school type and aims to develop fully the mental, physical and social capabilities of each pupil and so open the way, despite the handicap of blindness, to active and useful careers.¹⁴

This was also in-line with the practice identified in mainstream education by the sociologist Olive Banks, and strengthened after the establishment of the tripartite system, of schools deriving their 'prestige ...from the social and economic status of the occupations for which it prepare[d] students'.¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter Eight, designation as a grammar school, and the acquisition of these employment opportunities meant that there was an expectation of academic achievement and this was no less evident at this special school. One former student perceived a subtle change occurring during the 1950s as the stress on a general education, of primary importance in the era of Miss Monk, was replaced by an emphasis on qualifications.¹⁶ LEAs, as well as parents, would expect external examinations to be passed at a grammar school. Only students from secondary modern schools were supposed to have a curriculum unrestricted by such external demands and the assumption was that they were providing an inferior education which prepared their pupils for a lower status in society. For Chorleywood, the acquisition of academic qualifications still differentiated the status of the school very clearly from the other schools for the blind where School Certificate and then 'O' Level examinations were not taken in the 1940s and 1950s.

Although the school was more secure as a grammar school, outside pressures remained. The difference was that after 1944, external influences dictated that, in order to have its students considered the equals of their sighted peers, the College now had to adopt the grammar school model and prioritise the passing of examinations. The new school was to be created under the auspices of a new headmistress as the summer of 1944 saw the passing not only of a new Education Act, but also the appointment of Dorothy McHugh.

10.2 The role of the Headmistress

Phyllis Monk did not have to adapt to the changed pressures as she gave notice in the spring of 1944 that she would be retiring when she reached sixty in early 1945. This time the Governors were dealing with the vacancy in an established school and, with the confidence which came from a knowledge of the changing circumstances, they were prepared to raise the salary substantially to attract candidates of 'adequate quality'.¹⁷ Their status within special education was confirmed by Board officials who commented that the school was of a 'peculiar type', so that 'it would be fatal to have a poor head'; they considered the post therefore merited a higher salary than other special schools, particularly given their opinion that the headship was a career 'dead end'.¹⁸

Just as with the appointment of Miss Monk, and the headmasters of Worcester College, a decision appears to have been made to demonstrate conformity with mainstream standards by appointing from outside the world of special education. The post of headmistress was advertised openly this time in the national media, with the short-list being interviewed.¹⁹ There was also perhaps a desire to move forward from some of the aspects of the pre-war school with Winifred Deavin being passed over; she obviously felt the disappointment,

handing in her resignation a month later to teach at Wellington College, where she was to stay for a short time before joining the HMI.

The selected candidate, Dorothy McHugh, had gained a degree in Chemistry from Trinity College, Dublin, as well as a London Diploma in Theology. She had worked as Senior Science mistress at a county grammar school, but had no experience of headship, the problems of boarding schools or indeed of special schools. However, she was reported to have approached her tasks with ‘energy and vigour’ and, most critically, was bringing a grammar school ethos, and this was probably deliberate on the part of the governors, given the nature of the discussion which had taken place in the ‘war concerning the future of Chorleywood and Worcester (discussed in Chapter Seven).²⁰ The proposed change to grammar school status would finally end any tendency in the pre-war school towards an education which catered for members of the upper middle classes for whom the ‘development of class consciousness ... [was] more important than scholarship and achievement’; most girls would face the economic necessity to enter employment for at least part of their adult life.²¹

The individual agency of Miss McHugh was to be important, but her headship was less personally-focused than that of Miss Monk. She adopted the image of the grammar, rather than the special school head, wearing an academic gown on special occasions, although her staff only wore theirs for the arrival of the College President, the Princess Royal [Illustration 10-B]. She developed different school traditions with the School Birthday of 19th January, rather than the headmistress’s birthday, becoming the key event in the year. She also followed the practice of other 1940s secondary schools in acknowledging achievement amongst students through the holding of a prize day.²² However, there were

obvious limits to her desire to develop individualism as at the Saturday evening concerts during Lent she would not allow solo singing as she considered this could make a girl 'big-headed'.²³

Miss McHugh's approach to singing was perhaps the result of an educational philosophy which put a great emphasis on issues of responsibility as well as rewards. She does seem to have followed educational trends and was to adopt a system of prefects, which was to last until the 1960s when it was abolished as 'passé'.²⁴ Her introduction of prefects would have met the approval of John Newsom, the County Education Officer for Hertfordshire and a member of the appointing Governors' Sub-Committee. He argued that the county schools should adopt such features of the public schools which he added to their 'all-pervading ethos that stressed honesty, integrity and personal responsibility'.²⁵

The philosophy of the new headmistress was not one of creating the 'incarceration' which critics such as French have seen as leading to the segregation of special school students.²⁶ In 1946, there was the possibility of a move to Condoval Hall in Shropshire, which the NIB had purchased. Miss McHugh discussed the situation with her staff, but asserted her belief that being near London was good for students and staff. She recognised the lack of local contacts at Chorleywood but could only see the situation worsening as part of such a relocation.²⁷

As Dorothy McHugh took over a school preparing to contribute to a new structure of State education, she obviously realised the need to change Chorleywood's approach to meet the demands of a new era. However, what had been ensured was that the new school was keeping to its tradition of working outside the special school model.



Illustration 10-B: Miss McHugh with the Princess Royal during the opening of the extension, 1956.

10.3 Class and Selection

In helping to establish the new grammar school, Miss McHugh would have been aware that she would not have the restricted class base of the inter-war school. The change in status while bringing stability would also challenge some of the elitism of the pre-war College. Nevertheless, just as has been shown in Chapter Seven and Chapter Nine to have been the case in mainstream grammar schools and at Worcester College, change did not come immediately and equality of opportunity was not fully established.

Initially, the legacy of impressions of the old schools for the blind meant that there was some parental resistance to the transfer after eleven which Government regulations stipulated. Until the last group from the preparatory section had gone through to reach secondary age, Chorleywood did take a couple of students under eleven, but only with the permission of the Ministry of Education.²⁸ Daphne was one of these arriving from the junior section of a girls' high school at the age of nine and her example fitted the

perception, described in Chapter Seven, that the middle classes had been avoiding sending their children to the schools for the blind.²⁹ Another who came a year early due to parental misgivings about the primary schools for the blind was a girl whose father was blind and worked at Court Grange with blind children with other 'handicaps'.³⁰ In 1948, thirteen students came from special schools, although nine still came from home and nine from sighted schools. By 1956-7, the Government policy of expecting the blind to be educated in special schools was having an impact and, of eighteen pupils admitted, fifteen came from special schools, two from schools for the sighted and one from private tuition.³¹

Within these numbers, as demonstrated in Chapter Seven, and in-line with the experience of mainstream, the middle classes were still better placed when it came to accessing selective places. However, as at Worcester, the school did have to increasingly depend on students coming in from the other schools for the blind and this did have some impact on the class base of the pupils. As a grammar school with LEA funded pupils, there was a social mix, without the public school's fear of 'interclass familiarity'.³² Anne reported that students came from a range of backgrounds, with some pupils coming from working class backgrounds in the East End of London while others were from wealthier upper middle class families. Judy Taylor came from a Gloucestershire working-class family who struggled to stay above the poverty line, and she happily settled into Chorleywood.³³ However, when Daisy, who had lost her sight as a result of malnutrition, was interviewed by Sally French, she considered 'they all seemed a bit posh'. She reported that Miss McHugh said to her parents, "'You don't have to worry because every girl is treated equally in this school, whoever they are,'" but still felt that there was a class awareness and that the Headmistress was saying, 'Even though she's the lowest of the low we'll treat her the same.'³⁴

After becoming a grammar school, the nature of the tests did assist those who had been in a school for the blind, although the process could be amended for students from mainstream schooling who had passed an Eleven Plus, and this did help to broaden the class background of students.³⁵ Initially admission was by interview and report with an Entrance Examination introduced in 1946. This did not incorporate IQ testing, but initially involved reading a Braille passage, taking a dictation using a hand frame, and solving some simple arithmetical problems. By the 1950s, the English paper included a composition, a comprehension exercise and the correcting of poorly written sentences. One former student gained the impression that the test was not as difficult as the Eleven Plus examination sat by her sisters, and this was probably due to the fact that, unlike sighted girls, blind girls had an equal number of grammar school places available to those for their male peers.³⁶

However, as was the case at Worcester, other skills were assessed. There was an overnight stay and an interview with, at least, the headmistress. The assessment process included subjective judgement by the junior school and the teachers of Chorleywood which could have discriminated against some working class girls. Judy has commented that 'the interview with Dorothy McHugh, and the recommendation from one's previous school, were considered to be more indicative of whether or not one would benefit from the kind of education Chorleywood offered than the tests themselves'.³⁷ Nevertheless, girls were often not completely rejected, with some being admitted on a trial basis and others being encouraged to apply again.

The changed funding arrangements after the 1944 Education Act did seem to allow a broader range of students to access Chorleywood. The process, as has been demonstrated

in Chapter Seven, had its flaws but does not appear to have resulted in quite the level of social bias as was present in the admission process to mainstream grammar schools.

10.4 The Complex Influences of Gender

Chapters Five and Six presented the role played by class alongside gender in developments at Chorleywood College during the inter-war years, and this persisted as education entered the post-war era. The influence of gender becomes more complex in the light of the impact of the Second World War. Summerfield's oral history research with women war-workers resulted in a belief that there is 'no consensus to be found within personal testimony on this subject'.³⁸ She has described how the war can be seen as having transformed the lives of women through the new opportunities it brought for participation in 'essential work' and national defence.³⁹ However, she has also shown how a war in which the soldiers were encouraged to think that they were fighting to preserve their homes and families helped to polarize views, accentuating gender differences rather than minimising them.⁴⁰ Therefore, this may help to explain the continuities in a post-war world where women returned to their previous lives and status. In education, Brian Simon has considered that, 'Gender discrimination characteristic of pre-war schooling was also now reproduced anew'.⁴¹ An examination of the post-war history of Chorleywood College reveals all three interpretations of the impact of the war; transformation, continuity and polarization.

After 1945, there was a measure of transformation in the position of women in Britain which could have led to the encouragement of a bolder approach to the possibilities for girls. For some contemporaries, such as the Labour Member of Parliament Edith Summerskill, there had been a feeling that, in peacetime, women, with a wartime experience of increased freedom and responsibility, would have the confidence to seek a

new role as citizens outside the home.⁴² Even after the end of the war, the country remained short of labour so that women were encouraged to stay in the workplace.

For the girls of Chorleywood, the status of women may have appeared to have improved. The Board of Governors was increasingly influenced by people with a professional insight into education and women began to outnumber the men in 1945. Miss Archibald of St. Albans High School became the Vice-Chairman in 1945 with other senior educationalists, Miss Davidson of Watford Grammar, and Miss Stewart, the former Principal of Lincoln training college, joining in 1946 and 1950 respectively. They were accompanied by Miss Fletcher from London County Council and Mrs Robert Eichholz, daughter-in-law of the former HMI.⁴³ They were joined by women from other realms, such as Mrs Locket, a graduate of Oxford who had become a legal adviser at John Lewis; this, in itself, was significant of a change in attitude as, possibly for the first time, the Governors included a married working woman rather than a philanthropist doing 'good works' in her spare time.⁴⁴ The first representatives of the Old Girls' Association had joined the governors in 1938.⁴⁵ Many of the older male governors who owed more to Victorian and Edwardian views of gender were gone or their influence was waning and they had left by the beginning of the 1950s. After Eagar's retirement in 1949, Colligan attended, but appears to have been far less active in his influence on the Governors. The modified attitudes became evident when Mrs Wheelwright took the Chair after the resignation of Theodore Tylor.

However, the situation was far from one of equality and the new governors continued to be constrained by society's expectations. As Professor Olive Banks has illustrated from her own experiences, an educated woman faced considerable difficulties in getting employment and experienced negative responses from even quite politically left-wing

men.⁴⁶ She was told that as a married woman her 'happiness would come from home and children'.⁴⁷ As will be seen, the women on the Governors, although they took more of an interest in careers, did not push girls into pioneering paths. They were no longer educating girls who might have servants to help them, but the girls of the middle class who would be expected to look after their own homes.

One of the reasons for the conservatism of Miss McHugh and many of the women on the governors was perhaps the influence of the Hertfordshire County Educational Officer. John Newsom was becoming nationally known for his role in promoting the construction of new Secondary Modern Schools in his county, but he was also taking an increasing interest in the nature of education for girls, and expressing views which reflected the polarization of opinion. In his deliberately contentious book on *The Education of Girls* published in 1948, Newsom asserted that education should reflect 'differences between the sexes and their social function'.⁴⁸ Although he regarded a 'liberal' education as vital to the removal of 'littleness of mind and meanness of soul', he felt this was only to enable future wives and mothers to become 'accomplished home-makers, informed citizens and to use their leisure intelligently'.⁴⁹ He was critical of the girls' schools in the inter-war years for neglecting the domestic education of girls in order to provide a slavish imitation of boys' schooling which was a 'perversion' of the natural order and was not serving the pupils or the country well.⁵⁰ The academic style of education he said was only really suitable for a small number of girls; he supported this by assessing the relatively small number of women in professions other than nursing and teaching (both of which he saw as reflections of a maternal caring role).⁵¹ He felt that male resentment of women's encroachment into the professions and parental preference to pay for boys to undertake extended periods of qualification were understandable and should not be challenged.⁵²

This assessment came at a time when newspapers and magazines were stressing the importance of childcare and motherhood and playing on the guilt of women who went to work, blaming them for any problems experienced by their children.⁵³

Newsom does not appear to have had a direct influence after the appointment of the new headmistress, as he seems to have only managed to attend one Governors' meeting. However, Michael Colborne Brown, one of his deputies and the future RNIB Education Officer, was to join the governors in 1946 and the Governors did consider some of the issues which concerned the Senior Education Officer.⁵⁴ Newsom wished to see a curriculum for girls with time for the creative arts, as well as some cookery and housecraft.⁵⁵ An Inspectors' report of 1947 had criticised the lack of staffing available for cooking and housecrafts.⁵⁶ In 1948, a few girls were allowed to go to the County domestic science training facility on a Saturday morning and in the early 1950s, when additional buildings were acquired, a room was devoted to Domestic Science.⁵⁷ As will be demonstrated below, there was still a limited appreciation of the importance of the provision of basic living skills, but the image of conforming to gender stereotypes had to be maintained. Both the film made for the Louis Braille Centenary *Pathway into Light* and Illustration 10-C from the prospectus showed the girls with the school rabbits, displaying their caring and nurturing natures.



Illustration 10-C: Girls nurturing rabbits. From the School prospectus c. 1950.

When the RNIB made the film *Unseen Horizons* in the mid-1950s, the girls were shown reading and doing gymnastics, but there was also an emphasis on creative and domestic activities, such as knitting, playing the piano and working with kitchen equipment in a cookery class; this was accompanied by a commentary which confirmed the importance of fulfilling female roles by stating that ‘lots of husbands would like their wives to have a more developed sense of taste’.⁵⁸ Despite some of the limitations, shown in Chapter Eight, in the practical skills developed at Worcester College, notions of gender roles also meant that the film showed the boys doing Metalwork and Science, sports and performing in a play.

The gender conservatism of the school could also be seen in the choice of house names. Following the ship imagery of the school song, the dormitories were named by Miss McHugh after the ships of the Tudor adventurers. Okely, in her study of her girls’ public school, felt that such a choice linked to male figures as names for houses meant that

‘aspirations were stimulated which were simultaneously shown to be impossible for women to attain’.⁵⁹ This was an era in which School inspectors could praise a County Girls’ Grammar School History course for having ‘the sound aims of inspiring the girls with the example of great men’.⁶⁰ Women were not being set up as appropriate heroines for emulation.

Chorleywood was now securely established as a grammar school, but many of the pre-war attitudes were continuing to guide the education provided to the girls. The women who were playing an increasingly leading role in setting the tone remained conscious of the pressures of society and ensured that these blind girls gained acceptance by conforming to the more rigid roles assigned by society. The accentuated ‘double conformity’ which had existed for Miss Monk’s school, and was described in Chapter Five, had evolved; Delamont has shown that there was a need for girls’ grammar schools to maintain academic standards while making students from all social classes comply with perceptions of lady-like femininity, but for this school for the blind there was still a need to show the girls over-coming their disability.⁶¹ As will be demonstrated in the next two sections, any pushing against this in the curriculum and in an exploration of future careers had to be done with caution. In order to maintain a position outside the traditional special school model, Chorleywood College still felt it needed to follow trends rather than set them.

10.5 *Assessing a grammar school curriculum for blind girls*

Chorleywood, with Worcester College, has been seen by French as being an exception amongst schools for the blind in not providing an inferior education.⁶² However, the education provided for girls in the post-war world was again the result of the nexus of

disability with gender. Chorleywood did provide considerable opportunities for academic success and integration into adult life, although again the picture is more complex than being described as simply 'enabling' or 'disabling'.

The school continued to experience examination success in the same curriculum areas as before the war. Languages, History and Religious Knowledge, as well as English Literature and Language, were the backbone of the examination results at both 'O' and 'A' Level. General Science and Domestic Science were also taken with success by some students.⁶³ The appointment of Muriel Easter, a former student, led to the successful introduction of Economic History at A Level.⁶⁴ The pedagogy was based on the grammar school style of the time, but Inspectors and students agree that there was a lot of dictation; just as for Worcester College, a lack of materials in Braille remained a hindrance.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the inspectors made positive comments about some of the discussion in History and oral methods used in German, as well as written work in English.⁶⁶ The acquisition of passes at 'O' Level, or credits at School Certificate, appears to have been on a level comparable with Worcester College.⁶⁷ However, for reasons that will be developed below, the numbers taking, and gaining, 'A' level, and Higher Certificate, were lower.⁶⁸

Becoming a grammar school extended the student numbers and, by providing the freedom to extend the staff, should have promoted a better quality in the education, but the nature of the school did present problems and goes against the idea of the staff in special schools protecting their own position because of their vested interest. In 1948 and 1956, the full-time teaching staff consisted of four graduate staff and six with other specialist qualifications. Three of the teaching staff had the Diploma of the CTB. The staff who stayed were making a considerable commitment. Given the demand from the new

grammar schools for university-educated teachers, the school did have problems with gaining and retaining suitable staff. There were teachers on the staff who were unwilling to work for the CTB qualification and therefore left within the three years permitted.⁶⁹ Also, the Ministry had insisted on an extension of the lengths of terms, which led the staff to highlight concern about the impact of the long hours required in a residential school.⁷⁰ With women also leaving when they married, nearly half of the staff was replaced between 1954 and 1956.

Inevitably, there were problems with continuity and the development of the relevant expertise. The inspectors reported that Latin was taught by teachers who lacked the necessary background to divert from the textbook. The four failures at Higher Certificate were remarked upon by the Governors in 1948. A student commented that, although the grammar was very well-taught, they were not given practice in writing essays before they sat their 'O' Level.⁷¹

After Winifred Deavin had left, staffing problems also affected the teaching of Mathematics. Staff were not in post long enough to build up expertise so that most of the interviewees mentioned issues related to the teaching.⁷² Daisy felt that a temporary male Mathematics teacher only took notice of those with some sight, as he did not understand the issues of those working in Braille.⁷³ In the ten years to 1959, the school did not attempt to enter students for examination; a student with some sight who passed at 'O' Level did so by attending a local school for tuition.⁷⁴ Trigonometry and algebra were only taught to the most able and girls who needed a qualification for professional training took a certificate of proficiency in Arithmetic in their Lower Sixth. However, when she came back as an inspector, Deavin concluded that it was 'doubtful whether more than a few girls

would profit' from the re-establishment of examinations in Mathematics.⁷⁵ As was seen at Worcester in Chapter Nine, Chorleywood pupils did have to struggle with difficulties in recording calculations and a lack of textbooks, as well as problems with the diagrams on some of the Braille examination papers, but this did not stop boys from entering 'O' Level.

The problems with the teaching of the Mathematics hindered the development of Advanced Level Science, although there were also problems with carrying out experimental work. Under Dorothy McHugh, a scientist who was often seen around the school in her laboratory coat, the school was comparatively advanced in its delivery of Sciences to blind children; the practical skills of Science students were promoted during the visit of the Princess Royal (Illustration 10-D). Anne recalled that pupils had to do experiments even in the lower years. Miss McHugh demonstrated and talked them through, but 'it was certainly hands on'.⁷⁶ When an Australian researcher on the teaching of Science, Wexler, came over to Britain, he visited Chorleywood as well as Worcester College.⁷⁷ McHugh was later to write a chapter for a book published by the RNIB for the Viscount Nuffield Auxiliary Fund on *The Teaching of Science and Mathematics to the Blind*.⁷⁸ She described the way in which it would be possible to create 'a suitable set of experiments at any elementary level - sufficient certainly to give a basis of reality to theoretical work'.⁷⁹ Many students were successful at General Science for School certificate and then 'O' level.⁸⁰ However, the only 'A' level Science offered was Chemistry which could be taught by the headmistress, but the first candidate was to fail as a result of her problems in carrying out the calculations. She reported:

Practical Chemistry to A level was difficult because I struggled to read the calibrations and at that time it would have been considered

cheating to have a support worker. I certainly used a pipette on a regular basis but, I am sure, not very accurately.⁸¹

McHugh was to admit the limitations of what she had been able to achieve; 'I have not myself tried to carry the work beyond a fairly elementary level, but I believe someone with time and interest could well do so'.⁸²



Illustration 10-D: Student working in a laboratory during the visit of the Princess Royal.

Problems with practical skills meant that other areas of the academic curriculum were not effectively delivered. The prospectus may have suggested that the students were following

the standard range of grammar school subjects, but, despite Illustration 10-E, Geography was not really taught.⁸³ Miss Monk had hoped that, with the appointment of a specialist Geography teacher, the larger school might be able to allow teaching to senior girls.⁸⁴ The teacher obviously only stayed for a short time, and by the 1950s, there was a feeling was that Geography could only 'be developed at the expense of some other subject', and students concentrated on those subjects in which they would find it easier to achieve mainstream standards.⁸⁵



Illustration 10-E: Students examining the USA on a tactile globe and map.

At sixth form level, despite the aforementioned determination not to deliver a 'modern type' education, there was some flexibility in the curriculum offered with the inclusion of a commercial course.⁸⁶ Girls who were not following a Higher Certificate programme were taught typing and Braille shorthand, but, although in the more employment-conscious post-

war school there was no assertion that this was not vocational, there was an insistence that the instruction had higher goals than the course provided at the Royal Normal College. This became evident when the Ministry of Labour raised concern after a request for equipment to support the teaching of secretarial skills to some of the older girls.⁸⁷ The Ministry anticipated unsuitably trained people joining the labour market, but the school governors defended the school's work, and distinctive position, by asserting that students were being prepared for more administrative roles.⁸⁸ HMI Deavin used her knowledge as a former member of staff to assert that the girls were 'quite efficient at the end' in their typing and shorthand and would not require 'four years of technical training'.⁸⁹ The school continued to offer the course and, in 1952, *Pathway into Light*, showed a group of girls studying for commercial subjects.⁹⁰ Girls who took the course were developing some skills which they had built up through their school career. As at the pre-war school, typing was seen as a vital part of communicating in the 'outside world'. Typewriting was taught to the lower forms, and pupils were encouraged to type letters home.

The inclusion of typing within the school day was one example of Chorleywood placing slightly more emphasis on practical skills than was evident at Worcester College. Despite the pressure to ensure that the girls could pass examinations, the polarization of gender perceptions, and the decline of domestic servants, did create an awareness that some provision was necessary.⁹¹ For the first three secondary school years, pupils were taught raffia and cane work, as well as pottery and weaving. One former student, who was later to specialise in teaching handicrafts, stressed the importance of handcraft in the school, helping with hand and brain coordination.⁹² There was some teaching of cookery but this was restricted even into the 1950s, and for some students 'a joke', partly because of the lack of facilities.⁹³ Once the girls were in the Lower Fifth (Year 10) cookery was limited to

those doing School Certificate. However, outside the school day pupils were taught some other 'living skills', such as cleaning and making beds.⁹⁴

Just as at Worcester, Physical Education remained important, but the emphasis had changed away from the need for 'refinement' required of inter-war young ladies. A school club still did country dancing, but the 'double conformity' in girls' schools in the post-war years did not require the same level of grace as in the 1920s and the aim of timetabled lessons had become health and fitness.⁹⁵ This was evident in the prospectus which boasted that sports were chosen to 'give them vigorous exercise and to promote healthy competition'.⁹⁶ The priority was to demonstrate the normality of the grammar school curriculum, with gymnastics and swimming being the emphasis rather than Sport-X, or any other sport for the blind (Illustration 10-F).



Illustration 10-F: Physical Education. From the school prospectus, c. 1950.

When assessing their school life, former students do tend to reflect on the 'education' they received in its broadest sense and in the context of contemporary expectations of middle-class behaviour. Teaching in the classroom was only part of the experience they felt they had gained from Chorleywood. They certainly did not feel that they were being crammed merely to pass examinations.⁹⁷ They were prepared for membership of the middle classes by being given a very good grounding in speech, deportment and manners. Anne recalled that the speech training coach tried to knock her northern accent out of her, but this didn't create resentment against a school which she considers herself fortunate to have attended.⁹⁸ Girls were encouraged to maintain good poise through the continuation of the 'posture badges', but this was not seen as being too intimidating, 'as high standards were not required'.⁹⁹ Also, the same desire to develop personal presentational skills probably contributed to the requirement that groups of students had to produce items for a Saturday evening concert during Lent.¹⁰⁰ In many ways, the concerns of the school for developing confident and well-presented young ladies was a reflection of the middle class concerns of the school leadership, but the students did feel enabled for life in post-war Britain by acquiring the social capital required to become fully integrated female 'citizens'.¹⁰¹

The desire to develop personal presentational skills probably contributed to the requirement that groups of students had to produce items for a Saturday evening concert during Lent, but the development of musical appreciation remained more important than it was for Bradnack at Worcester (Chapter Nine).¹⁰² All girls in the lower forms were taught to play the piano, with many in Senior School opting to continue lessons, and they could also learn a 'reasonable' second instrument (which appears to have meant one of the string instruments).¹⁰³ The History of Music and singing were taught in class lessons, with extra-curricular encouragement through a Music Club and attendance at local and London

concerts and events.¹⁰⁴ The aesthetic priorities linked to gender in the inter-war period (evident in Chapter Six) remained in the desire to create a sense of knowledge and accomplishment within the culture of the elite.

Therefore the academic and broader curriculum did meet many needs, but the post-1944 growth in categorization of disability did not assist with all individual needs. As a special school for the blind, Braille remained the main medium of work and staff knowledge of specialist codes, such as those for music and foreign languages, would have been an essential part of much of the academic success.¹⁰⁵ Despite changes in the attitudes of some ophthalmologists (see Chapter Seven), the approach to the partially sighted was slow to alter at Chorleywood, as well as at Worcester, and, apart from in mathematics, girls were still taught in Braille. A student with some sight was allowed to relearn handwriting before going off to a college, but, at a reunion in 1954, some former students did comment on the need to encourage more drawing for the partially sighted.¹⁰⁶ French has reflected that such practices were 'oppressive', and, at the time, the position of those with some useful sight was beginning to cause concern.¹⁰⁷ After the inspection of 1956, some students were moved to schools for the sighted where it was considered they could be educated more efficiently.

Chorleywood was only set up for the blind and the problems the few children with additional needs faced were evident, and illustrate again the complexity of the 'pecking order' involved in special education. A girl with epilepsy whose 'deteriorating condition' was impacting on her work was removed 'in her own interest and that of other pupils'.¹⁰⁸ However, the school appears to have been fairly flexible in its approach to a student with an additional hearing impairment. Daisy mentions her group learning the manual alphabet,

and the girls being 'treated very well', with the result that she 'opened up a lot'.¹⁰⁹ This girl had arrived from Condovery, having passed three 'O' Levels, and was to gain three 'A' Levels. She then had problems finding a suitable course, initially having to go to the Royal Normal College to learn typing. A teacher training college was unwilling to accept her unless she wished to return to Condovery; she did do this and was to become an inspirational teacher and active member of DeafBlind UK.¹¹⁰

An assessment of whether there was an 'enabling' curriculum does, therefore, depend on the nature and aptitudes of the individual pupil. Difficulties associated with the production of materials were still preventing the development of the curriculum, but external pressures linked to class and gender still created constraints. However, any judgement must consider the fact that most of the former students interviewed do feel that they gained a good education which has stood them in good stead for both their lives and future careers.

10.6 The continuing problem of finding a suitable job for a blind woman

The ability of Chorleywood girls to pass examinations was important due to the continuation of the pre-war trend (shown in Chapters Four and Six) of requiring qualifications before entering the professions. At Chorleywood, students were able, if they were hard-working and attentive, to progress academically and achieve at a level comparable to their sighted mainstream peers.¹¹¹ However, some students have felt that the more average student could have been pushed more and this can be seen as a consequence of the differences which remained in the career options available for Chorleywood girls compared with the Worcester boys.¹¹² The problem was that the school authorities felt constrained by perceptions of what would be a suitable goal for girls in adult life, and what

was possible for the blind. Okely has claimed that, in a girls' public school, 'few, if any, of the girls entered occupations comparable to their brothers', and blind grammar school girls were not able to enter a range of occupations comparable with their blind male peers.¹¹³ Staff and female governors were taking a new interest in possible career opportunities, but society and the attitudes of Government towards gender and disability presented obstacles which left the school continuing to follow trends rather than pioneering a way forward.

Just as has been shown in the last chapter to have been the case at Worcester, the experience of war did not bring immediate changes in the careers options promoted. Instead there was a renewed focus on realities and pre-war practice continued to influence thinking. Chorleywood's prospectus related how:

Experience has shown that for girls whose parents cannot find openings for them, the most suitable careers are to be found in Physiotherapy, Music, Lecturing, Home Teaching for the Blind, and School Teaching for those who have sufficient sight for supervision.¹¹⁴

With the broadening of the background of students, the emphasis had to be even more focused on gaining future employment. No longer did the school have the luxury of believing that many of its students would not need to find work. The status of both the girls in adult life, and the school itself, would be dependent on the paths that they were able to pursue.

In the prospectus the school did present a positive view of what was possible, but they tempered it with caution.

There are a number of careers in which blindness is not an insuperable obstacle and many blind women are not only supporting themselves, but making a valuable contribution to the life of the nation.

Although anecdotal evidence would suggest that more of the girls would marry, most did have to work for at least a few years.¹¹⁵ The majority of students found jobs, but whether they fully achieved their potential can be questioned. Nevertheless, again this should not be seen as an area dictated by the girls' disability. Academically-able sighted girls also found themselves restricted by perceptions of their future roles and opportunities. Okely, in her account of her experiences at a girls' public school, described how going to university was not part of learning 'lessons correctly'.¹¹⁶ Out of a class of about thirty-five, at most six remained to take sometimes a single A' level, and, despite having gained thirteen 'O' levels and entering for four 'A' levels, Okely was told by the senior mistress that she would be 'selfish to go to University, ... thereby depriving a worthier person of a place'.¹¹⁷ Such views have been supported by the work of Angela Davis who quoted a former grammar school student whose contemporaries just took the 'odd O levels'.¹¹⁸ Although the Government wanted more grammar school students to stay on until eighteen, many girls were looking to gain employment in clerical work or in nursing for which higher level qualifications were not necessary.¹¹⁹

The impact which gender did play in influencing perceptions continues to be evident in the different approach of the two grammar schools for the blind with regard to careers in the Law. Whereas the Worcester College magazine discussed the possibilities as well as the difficulties of pursuing the Law, the women of the governors were slow to see the potential for their girls.¹²⁰ The costs during training and the problems of gaining clients in the first precarious years did create problems and this had meant that, despite the time which had elapsed since the Law and Bar Societies had been forced to open up membership, few women were entering the profession. When a blind girl did qualify in the 1940s, she was not a former student of Chorleywood.¹²¹ The first former student to go into the Law did so after finding difficulty in gaining employment after completing an Arts degree. It was only after the pioneering success of these two young women that the Governors were persuaded that 'there was no reason why a blind woman should not be as successful in Law as a blind man'.¹²²

The staff and students at Chorleywood were affected by their awareness of the additional obstacles to employment presented by gender. One of the Governors did report the problems experienced by many sighted Arts graduates in finding work outside teaching. When two female governors explored careers with eight of the senior girls in 1947 they were told by the pupils that they felt there was a 'limited choice open to them'.¹²³ Although they said that they would have liked to go to university, they could not see that it would be of any benefit, as 'teaching seemed closed to them'.¹²⁴ As a result, many girls were not encouraged to go to university, not so much because they were incapable, but because of a perception that, if a girl was not particularly academically motivated, there was little point. This was probably why most pupils only did 'O' Level, with little encouragement to re-sit if they failed.¹²⁵ Of ninety-six leavers from Chorleywood between

1946 and 1956, thirty-nine were trained for telephony and secretarial work. This compared with the eighteen who went to the universities, four to colleges of music and seven to the teacher training colleges.¹²⁶

Another eighteen girls went into physiotherapy, and, just as for the boys of Worcester College, progress to the RNIB Physiotherapy school was a favoured route for those with General Science O' level and sufficient height.¹²⁷ Former students interviewed felt the advice they had received to follow this path (even when the one was initially thinking in terms of a History degree) had been sound, and that they had been able to have fulfilling careers.¹²⁸ In 1953, it was reported that all those who had qualified had found employment.¹²⁹ The RNIB's role in provision was similarly critical for Commercial training with many students going on to Pembridge Place.

Given the broader problems of society's attitudes to disability and gender, the school of the 1940s and 1950s generally seems to have applauded the realism of looking to gain security and fulfilment through tested routes, rather than encouraging the girls to push boundaries. Judy Taylor had initially discussed the possibilities of becoming an actress with the Drama teacher and considers she was given 'good advice' that, in that era, she would have only had 'curiosity value' so that a long career would have been unlikely.¹³⁰

For those with the motivation, a number of pupils who had gained Higher Certificate and then 'A' level did progress to university. Despite the initial problems many of them faced in gaining appropriate employment, Miss McHugh defended the practice of sending students off to do Arts degrees.¹³¹ Although fourteen Worcester boys went up to Oxford between 1943 and 1958, there was only one Chorleywood success at the end of the fifteen

years. With only five women's colleges, and without the assistance of a female equivalent to Tylor at Oxford, the girls were at a disadvantage compared with the boys.¹³² However, they did succeed in gaining places at 'Redbrick' and other new universities such as Nottingham and University College Swansea at a level which appears to have been, at least, on a par with other girls' grammar schools. In the six years to February 1952, Windsor County Girls' Grammar, a school over four times the size, sent six girls to universities and sixteen to training colleges, compared to Chorleywood's eight and five respectively.¹³³

The efforts of some students to go into teaching do demonstrate the impact of disability operating in a similar manner to that seen at Worcester in the last chapter. Partially sighted students were able to qualify and gain employment in mainstream schools, but they were hindered by the practice of some LEAs, such as the LCC which had a policy of not employing any 'handicapped' teachers.¹³⁴ As a consequence, former pupils often depended on personal recommendation or had to take a series of temporary appointments.¹³⁵ The attitude of the Ministry of Education, described in Chapter Nine, made it increasingly difficult for blind students to be accepted for training, and a Teacher Training College was reported as wanting an assurance that there was a post in view before they would accept a blind student.¹³⁶ Eagar's opinions were again important as he anticipated problems with the girls' training because he considered that discipline could be a problem if working with junior students, but the NIB was said to have taken up individual cases with the Ministry; unfortunately without much success.¹³⁷ As a result some pupils were discouraged from going into teaching. A girl who wanted to be a domestic science teacher was sent to a College of Technology on a Three Year Diploma Course in Hotel Catering and Management. She was to work in the catering industry and spent two years as a matron at

a boys' public school. She was later to gain employment in teaching practical skills in special schools.¹³⁸

However, unlike Bradnack at Worcester College, Miss McHugh did encourage some blind students to go into teaching. Aware that teaching was the most accessible career for academic sighted women, she was keen to have at least two blind members of staff; but she found difficulties as there were no trained teachers available and blind graduates had to be sent for training while on the staff.¹³⁹ When Judy Taylor went to the headmistress to discuss her 'vocation' to teach sighted students, Miss McHugh helped her to become the first blind girl to gain entry to a Ministry-recognised teacher-training college.¹⁴⁰ Judy nearly lost her funding while on the course, because the Ministry decided that it was a waste of public money when she could not qualify. She was only able to finish because she lobbied various officials, and was supported by letters from Miss McHugh, the training College Principal and the Heads of her teaching practice schools. Judy did gain employment teaching Music and English in schools in Warwickshire and Derbyshire.¹⁴¹

There was a need to extend the possibilities available and, by the late 1940s, the female governors again looked to examples presented by the sighted girls' grammar schools. Mrs Eichholz suggested that there could be openings in social welfare with Local Authorities, perhaps aware that only students with some sight had been able to take positions in this sphere in the inter-war period. For a year, Chorleywood was affiliated to the Women's Employment Federation, as well as gaining advice from the NIB Employment Officer.

Although the school authorities remained cautious in their suggestions for careers, Chorleywood was providing the skills and confidence that allowed students to be pioneers.

Judith Treseder, the student who went up to Oxford and took a History degree in the late 1950s, pushed some of the boundaries. She decided that she did not want to teach and, having gained an interest in prison work through a university society, took a place at Barnett House in Oxford to study for a diploma in Public and Social Administration.¹⁴² She then became interested in mental health and Psychiatric social work, and began a career which led from the Psychiatric department of Maudsley Hospital to a national role as a board member and assessor for the British Journal of Social Work and Chair of the Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry. She maintained an interest in issues related to visual impairment joining the Social Services Consultancy Unit at the RNIB and later taking the Chair of Action for Blind People.¹⁴³

Despite the success of such students, in the post-war years there seems to have been a tension between the apparent change represented by the increasing numbers of professional women on the Governors and what they felt they could practically encourage girls to look towards as a career. There was a consciousness that the girls who were now at Chorleywood would need to support themselves, and therefore a feeling that pushing the girls into new professions would not be the way to ensure financial security. This was not really challenged by most of the girls who seem to have felt constrained by society's perceptions of what was possible.

10.7 Enabling or Disabling?

A career on its own would not be enough to allow the girls to be fully enabled to become independent and confident citizens. The girls were well aware of the difficulties they faced integrating into society. They perceived a lack of understanding from a 'sighted world' containing people some of whom considered 'them peculiar and abnormal'.¹⁴⁴ When

asked at the 1954 Reunion about Employment issues, they expressed the feeling that they needed somebody from the RNIB to liaise with firms at a personal level to explain 'they weren't monsters'.¹⁴⁵ However, former students do take a generally positive view of what the school had provided to help them enter adult life, but again, and just as at Worcester, they are conscious of some weaknesses; and these again were linked to the context of boarding and grammar schooling in this era.

Miss McHugh and Miss Crawshaw, the matron, were aware of the importance of presentation, realising that the 'first impact every blind girl makes on the world is how they look, how they speak [and] how they come into the room', but they were not attuned to the post-war world.¹⁴⁶ Although there were some changes to uniform and some discussion of make-up, there was criticism that the girls were not being guided in how to present themselves as young women. Daisy felt that '[t]hey didn't want us to be aware of ourselves as young women and we were made to feel asexual'.¹⁴⁷ As was the case for the boys of Worcester, former students have also been critical of the very limited nature of the sex education provided.¹⁴⁸ Many Chorleywood girls have reflected that the problems arose because the teachers were single women who lived in school accommodation through the terms, and were therefore divorced from the world outside; a continuation of a complaint that had been made of all spinster 'schoolmarms' since in 1914 the headmistress of Manchester Grammar School had admitted a perception that such women led an 'abnormal life'.¹⁴⁹ Miss McHugh was seen as calm, wise, pleasant and dedicated, but happier in her garden than with social skills.¹⁵⁰ This would all have added to the difficulties faced when students left the college. For many, going to College and University after gaining skills from school helped them to adapt, but one girl who went to Drama School dropped out because she was totally unprepared for the nature of the place.¹⁵¹

Again, as at Worcester, a lack of training in mobility techniques was an issue. Students went out in 'crocodiles' in the younger years, and were allowed to go out in pairs once they had reached fifteen, although there was usually an expectation that one of them should have some sight. Girls felt embarrassed when they carried a white stick, as it was seen as 'unfeminine' and their use was only encouraged from 1959.¹⁵² As a result, one partially sighted student was reported as feeling that she was 'used' as a guide, but most seem to have been happy with an arrangement which allowed them to go into Rickmansworth, the local town.¹⁵³ In fact, this level of restriction does not compare too badly with some of the public schools for the sighted. Okely's account of her school talks about being isolated. They were allowed no access to the nearby town with the over-fifteens only permitted to go for walks in threes.¹⁵⁴

The main problem identified, and an issue which seems to support French's criticism of the 'regimentation' of schools for the blind, was that the lives of the pupils were so controlled.¹⁵⁵ As a legacy of the humanism and Quaker links of Miss Monk, the girls were allowed to choose their own place of worship, but they were allowed little spare time. The weekends and evenings were filled with activities. They did visit London to attend concerts, museums and plays, and there were invitations to tea with local families.¹⁵⁶ This all created interests and prevented boredom and misbehaviour, but it did create problems when controlling their own lives in adulthood. Also, despite all the contacts, there was a feeling of isolation. At the 1954 reunion, former students expressed a feeling that more sighted company while at school would have been useful, although there was an admission that this was difficult to provide.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps such comments did lead to Judith being allowed to go to Watford Grammar as part of her 'University Entrance' year before Oxford,

as well as the later involvement with the Chorleywood Teenagers' Club, but, before that, students did feel that contacts created through sports matches or attendance at concerts at the local Masonic school had not resulted in real mixing.¹⁵⁸

However, despite these issues, students did acquire a variety of skills, and were given opportunities to take some level of responsibility so that they would be able to function as active citizens. Sixth Formers were nominated by other pupils to become prefects. They supervised evening 'preparation', as well as keeping order at meals. The school would have felt that it could deny any of the criticisms by Cutsforth (discussed in Chapter Seven) as it claimed in its Prospectus:

It is fulfilling its aim of "helping them to develop into independent and acceptable members of society."¹⁵⁹

Judy feels that she benefited from the emphasis on developing an 'independent attitude, and a spirit of adventure'.¹⁶⁰ Such an enterprising approach to life must have been further developed in the early 1950s when trips began to foreign destinations such as Paris and Switzerland and field study centres across the United Kingdom.¹⁶¹ In such ways, Dorothy McHugh was seeking to get the students to 'accept themselves, so that they could 'cope with their difficulties' and 'get on with living with others'.¹⁶² For Judy, this was an approach which encouraged a girl to have a 'healthy attitude towards her handicap'.¹⁶³

Former students have been able to contribute actively and successfully beyond their homes and workplaces. Amongst those interviewed were former students who have become governors of special and mainstream schools, a lay preacher, and a member of a utility

Customer Services Committee. Judy Taylor was to become a speaker and then a regional fund-raiser for Guide Dogs for the Blind. Despite some of the limitations, most former students have recognised that Chorleywood did give them important skills which have allowed them to adapt to the challenges presented by adult life.

10.8 Summary

The shared experience of war-time and the 1944 Education Act may have increased the social range of blind girls able to gain a secondary education, but gender continued to restrict their prospects. Many of the differences evident between Chorleywood and Worcester Colleges in the inter-war years were still present and indicate the need for any study of the special education of girls to consider the additional constraints within which the school was operating. The academic curriculum was offering the chance of achievement but a level of opportunity comparable to that provided at Worcester was impossible while the girls were struggling with the 'double discrimination' of gender and disability.

Alongside this class was continuing to play a role. In order to ensure that their students gained the social capital which a middle class grammar school education could provide, the staff were working within Delamont's 'last throes' of 'double conformity', but again accentuated by the need to counter negative perceptions of disability.¹⁶⁴ Such pressures to achieve high academic standards meant that the College did not always ensure the acquisition of the domestic skills which were a lower priority at the mainstream grammar schools with which the girls needed to compete if they were to gain access to the same status.

In looking at Chorleywood College, it becomes evident that even those former students with some negative feelings felt that it did teach independence and 'to help other people'.¹⁶⁵ This goes against Borsay's assumption that, while the 1944 Act opened up opportunities for the academically-able disabled to gain a secondary education, the pupil's 'self-esteem was ...ill-served by a segregated institution that exuded dependency and impeded association with non-disabled children'.¹⁶⁶ Miss McHugh and her staff were responding to academic priorities and did achieve comparable results which, along with the social skills promoted, did enable their students in adult life. The school may have been influenced by the limitations of the female role but it was not preparing its pupils to be dependent and disabled.

10.9 References

¹ See Ch. 7 introduction.

² Cole, 79, having mentioned the opening of Chorleywood as a 'grammar school' in 1921 makes no reference to a change in the 1940s: French, *Oral History*, 360.

³ Delamont, *Knowledgeable*, 180.

⁴ Pugh describes how women politicians such as Shirley Williams and Barbara Castle saw no need to get involved in 'women's issues' because that was a fight which had been won by their mothers' generation. Pugh, *Women*, 285.

⁵ Armstrong, 'Historical development', 441.

⁶ P Summerfield, "'It did me good in lots of ways"; British women in transition from war to peace,' in C. Duchon and I. Bandhauer-Schöffmann (eds.), *When the war was over; Women, War and peace in Europe, 1940-56* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 13.

⁷ Report of visit by HMI Deavin, 25/6/1953, ED32/15050 NA.

⁸ CW Gov Mins, 11/5/1956. Sub-Committee for Careers, 8/3/1948.

⁹ Comments NCWFSA email forum, February 2007.

¹⁰ CW Gov Mins, 3/10/1952.

¹¹ CW Gov Mins, 17/2/1950.

¹² Ministry of Education report by Her Majesty's Inspector and a Medical officer of the Ministry on Chorleywood College, 27th-30th November 1956,3. HORSAs were the Huttering Operation for Raising the School-leaving age.

¹³ Interview Note, 4/5/1945, ED32/1095 NA.

¹⁴ CW Prospectus 1950.

¹⁵ Banks, 252-3.

¹⁶ Interview Anne.

¹⁷ Letter from Eagar to the Secretary of the Board of Education, 15/6/1944, ED32/1095 NA.

¹⁸ Comments by Board of Education, 30/7/1944, ED32/1095 NA.

¹⁹ The post was advertised in *The Times*, *Times Educational Settlement*, and *Manchester Guardian*, CW Mins, 24/3/1944.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ J. Okely, 'Privileged, schooled and finished: boarding education for girls', in G. Weiner and M. Arnot (eds.), *Gender Under Scrutiny* (London, 1987), 101.

²² CW Gov Mins 3/5/1948.

²³ Interview Barbara.

²⁴ McHugh interview Track 8 MS4000/6/1/54/102C CPA.

²⁵ Parker, *Newsom*, 47.

²⁶ S. French, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Experiences and Effect of a 'Special' Residential School", in J. Morris (ed.), *Encounters with Strangers Feminism and Disability* (London: the Women's Press, 1996), 46.

²⁷ CW Gov Mins, 14/10/1946. Conover was used for a school for the multi-handicapped

²⁸ The last boy did not leave for Worcester College until 1948.

²⁹ Interview Daphne.

³⁰ Letter 4/7/1946, ED32/1095 NA.

³¹ CW Gov Mins.

³² Okely, 104.

³³ J. Taylor, *As I See It* (London: Grafton, 1989), 11.

³⁴ French, *Oral History*, 175.

³⁵ Interview Anne.

³⁶ Thom has pointed out that, in practice, girls in mainstream education had to gain higher 11+ scores than boys in order to gain a grammar school place: D. Thom, 'Better a Teacher than a hairdresser? "A Mad passion for equality" or Keeping Molly and Betty down,' in F. Hunt (ed.), *Lessons for Life*, 141-2.

³⁷ Judy T. email 12/6/2010.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁹ Summerfield, 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Simon, *Education*, 142-3.

⁴² E. Summerskill, 'Conscription and Women,' *The Fortnightly* 151 (1942): 213.

⁴³ CW GovMins, 11/2/1946, 2/6/1950, 24/3/1944.

⁴⁴ CW GovMins, 12/6/1944, 11/2/1946.

⁴⁵ CW GovMins. 17/11/1938.

⁴⁶ O. Banks, 'Some Reflections on Gender, Sociology and Women's History', *Women's History Review* 8 (1999): 405.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ R. A. Butler in the Preface considered that there was an 'intention to shock'. J. Newsom, *The Education of Girls* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 9, 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 160, 137.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 31, 32-3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 31-2.

⁵³ Pugh, *Women*, 296.

⁵⁴ Newsom resigned in 1950 as a result of his 'irregular' attendance, CW Gov Mins 17/2/1950.

⁵⁵ Newsom, 117.

⁵⁶ Sub-Committee on Careers, CW Gov Mins, 8/3/1948.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Unseen Horizons*, Reel 1 (RNIB, 1958). Available at www.britishpathe.com (16/6/2010).

⁵⁹ Okely, 107.

⁶⁰ Windsor County Girls Grammar School, Inspection Report 29th-31st Jan and 1st Feb. 1952, ED162/99 NA.

⁶¹ Delamont, *Knowledgeable*, 180.

⁶² French, *Oral History*, 360.

⁶³ Interviews with past students confirmed this. *The New Beacon* XXXV (1951): 216, XXXVII (1953): 211, XXXVIII (1954): 235.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Education Report, 1956, 7. Confirmed by record of results in *New Beacon* XXXVIII (1954), 235.

⁶⁵ Ministry Report 1956, 7-8: Interview Anne.

⁶⁶ Ministry Report 1956, 7-9.

⁶⁷ Results recorded in *New Beacon*, XXXVII (1953): 235, XXXVIII (1954): 235. CW Gov Mins would suggest 85% of the boys and 78% of girls left with at least 4 'O' levels or a School certificate.

The exception was 1948 where the Governors felt the results were 'poor', and this was blamed on most of the students entering the school late. CW Gov Mins, 4/10/1948.

⁶⁸ In 1953-4, 48% of WCB boys leaving had at least one A level, compared with 28% of the girls.

⁶⁹ Report of visit by HMI Deavin, 25/6/1953, ED32/15050 NA.

⁷⁰ CW Govs mins, 29/9/1947.

⁷¹ Interview Barbara.

⁷² CW Gov mins. 29/9/1947: Interviews Barbara, Daphne and Anne.

⁷³ French, *Oral History*, 176.

⁷⁴ CW Gov Mins, 2/10/1959: Interview Anne.

⁷⁵ Ministry Report, 1956, 5.

⁷⁶ Anne email, 23/2/2007.

⁷⁷ A. Wexler, *Experimental Science for the Blind. An Instruction Manual* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1961).

⁷⁸ D. A. McHugh, 'The teaching of Chemistry in a School for the Blind,' in Fletcher, 30-2.

⁷⁹ McHugh, 31.

⁸⁰ *The New Beacon* XXXV (1951): 216, XXXVII (1953): 211, XXXVIII (1954): 235.

⁸¹ Anne email, 23/2/2007.

⁸² McHugh, 31.

⁸³ Interview Anne.

⁸⁴ Monk, 113.

⁸⁵ Ministry Report, 5.

⁸⁶ See 10.1.

⁸⁷ Ministry of Labour letter to the Ministry of Education, 27/4/1949, NA, ED32/1505.

⁸⁸ CW Gov mins, Sub-Committee Careers, 8/3/1948.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Pathway into Light*.

⁹¹ James, 531-2.

⁹² Interview Daphne.

⁹³ Anne could only recall making rice pudding.

⁹⁴ Interview Barbara.

⁹⁵ See Chapter Five.

⁹⁶ CW Prospectus, 1950.

⁹⁷ Interview Anne.

⁹⁸ Email Forum Anne, 17/7/2003.

⁹⁹ Interview Anne.

¹⁰⁰ Interview Barbara.

¹⁰¹ Interview Barbara.

¹⁰² Interview Barbara.

¹⁰³ CW Gov mins, 11/2/1946.

¹⁰⁴ Ministry Report, 11-13.

¹⁰⁵ In the RNIB film about Louis Braille, *Pathway Into Light* (1952), Chorleywood girls were shown using literary and music Braille. Available at www.britishpathe.com (27/11/2003). NCWFSA forum discussion reflect the importance of a knowledge of Braille.

¹⁰⁶ CW Gov. Mins Addendum B, 15/10/1954.

¹⁰⁷ S. French, "Don't Look! The History of Education for Partially Sighted Children." *British Journal of Visual Impairment* 23, no. 3 (2005): 112.

¹⁰⁸ CW Gov Mins 19/5/1947.

¹⁰⁹ French, *Oral History*, 176-7.

¹¹⁰ CW Gov Mins, 9/5/1958: *Open Hand* (Spring 2009), 44.

¹¹¹ Interview Barbara.

¹¹² Interview Daphne.

¹¹³ Okely, 103.

¹¹⁴ CW Prospectus, 1950.

¹¹⁵ Report 1956 mentions 'Quite a number have married': Many of my interviewees from this era had married.

¹¹⁶ Okely, 102.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 103.

¹¹⁸ A. Davis, "'So it wasn't a brilliant education not really I don't think": Class, Gender and Locality. Women's Accounts of School in Rural Oxfordshire, c.1930-60,' *History of Education Researcher*, 78 (2006): 77.

¹¹⁹ Evident in the Inspection reports for Windsor Girls Grammar school 1952 and Faringdon County Secondary School for Girls 4-7 October 1960, ED162/81 NA.

¹²⁰ In 1953 a Special meeting of the Governors examined the issue of Careers.

¹²¹ CW Govs Sub-Committee on Careers, 8/3/1948. The girl had been a former short-hand typist.

¹²² Special Committee on Careers, CW Gov mins, 30/1/1953.

¹²³ CW mins, 19/5/1947.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*.

¹²⁵ Interview Daphne: Comment by Daisy in French, *Oral History*, 179.

¹²⁶ Ministry Report, 1956, 2.

¹²⁷ The height qualification is quoted in Daisy's interview in French, *Oral History*, 108.

¹²⁸ Interviews Dorothy and Anne.

- ¹²⁹ Special Committee on Careers, CW Gov mins, 30/1/1953.
- ¹³⁰ Taylor, 24.
- ¹³¹ CW Gov Mins, 9/5/1952.
- ¹³² See 4.6 and 9.3.
- ¹³³ Windsor Girls Grammar report 1952: Figures based on CW Gov Mins, 1946-51.
- ¹³⁴ One taught French at Hereford High School. CW Gov Mins, 1/10/1960.
- ¹³⁵ CW Gov Mins 11/10/1957.
- ¹³⁶ CW Govs mins, 9/5/1952.
- ¹³⁷ CW Gov Mins, 19/5/1947.
- ¹³⁸ Interview Daphne.
- ¹³⁹ CW Gov Mins, 25/1/1952.
- ¹⁴⁰ Taylor, 29. Earlier students had gone to train in Montessori methods on a non-recognised course.
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Chapters 4 and 6.
- ¹⁴² Email Judy Smith, 8/7/2010.
- ¹⁴³ Judy Smith Action for Blind People 'Governance and Financials'
www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk/about-us/financials/ [6/7/2010]
- ¹⁴⁴ CW Govs minutes Addendum B 15/10/1954.
- ¹⁴⁵ Headmistress's Report of a discussion at the Old Girls' Reunion, 1954.
- ¹⁴⁶ McHugh interview Track 2 MS4000/6/1/54/102/C
- ¹⁴⁷ French, *Oral History*, 180.
- ¹⁴⁸ NCWFSA email forum July 2010.
- ¹⁴⁹ NCWFSA email forum July 2010: Nicholson, 126-9: Sara Burstall, quoted in L. Measor and P.J. Sikes, *Gender and Schools* (London: Cassell, 1992), 40.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, 29: Interviews Anne and Barbara.

¹⁵¹ CW Govs minutes Addendum B 15/10/54, Headmistress's Report of a discussion at the Old Girls' Reunion, 1954: Interview Anne.

¹⁵² French, *Oral History*, 282: CW GovMins 1/5/1959

¹⁵³ Interview Anne.

¹⁵⁴ Okely, 104.

¹⁵⁵ French, 355.

¹⁵⁶ Taylor, 23.

¹⁵⁷ CW Govs minutes Addendum B 15/10/1954, Headmistress's Report of a discussion at the Old Girls' Reunion, 1954

¹⁵⁸ Interviews: French, *Oral History*, 284-5.

¹⁵⁹ Report 1956.

¹⁶⁰ Taylor, 19.

¹⁶¹ CW GovMins, Notebooks, B3 NCW.

¹⁶² McHugh interview, Track 1 MS4000/6/1/54/103/C CPA

¹⁶³ Taylor, 19.

¹⁶⁴ See Ch.10 introduction and Ch.5.5.

¹⁶⁵ Interview Daphne.

¹⁶⁶ Borsay, *Disability*, 111-2.

11. Conclusion: 'They can because they think they can'

This thesis confirms the importance Copeland has identified of studying special education 'within the parameters presented by a much wider social context'.¹ Chorleywood and Worcester Colleges were working within the attitudes and mores of the first half of the twentieth century to enable their students. 'They can because they think they can' was the motto of Worcester College, with the girls of Chorleywood being described in their school song as 'a pioneer lot' using a wind that was 'blowing forward'.² There was an assumption of capacity and ability rather than the '*incapacity and inability*' Tomlinson has associated with special schools.³

'Presentism' has affected much of the writing on special schools and is a reflection of the feeling of writers such as French that 'insider views ... need to be connected to a political analysis in order to bring about change'.⁴ From a contemporary perspective, it is easy to criticise the Colleges, as was done by the headmaster who led Worcester College into its merger with Chorleywood to become RNIB New College Worcester. Rev. Bob Manthorp weighed up how:

Their strengths were in two major areas: the very high level of academic challenge and success which marked both Schools; and the excellent recreational opportunities all the pupils had access to. The same people will also know their weaknesses: the institutional nature of their boarding accommodation; the narrowness of their social opportunities, the lack of daily living skills particularly for the boys and the problems of isolation for the girls.⁵

Carrying out a fine-grained historical study of the situation in special schools up to 1958 has highlighted the significance of many of the changes which have taken place in society and education since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 and the principles of entitlement which came from the introduction of statements as a result of the 1981 Education Act.⁶ The situation of provision for visually impaired people has also been helped by the introduction of Information and Communication Technology which has enabled larger quantities of materials to become available in Braille or through speech programs, as well as making communication with the 'print' world easier. The important thing for an historian is to judge the past in context. The refinement of Phyllis Monk, the elitism of G. C. Brown, the authoritarianism of Brian Bradnack, and the unworldliness of Dorothy McHugh do not translate easily into the society of another century. However, they were reflecting general attitudes within the education of the time, and such practices should not be judged in isolation.

Triangulating sources through the linking of written reports from 'above' with documents from the schools themselves, as well as accounts from the students themselves, has been useful for creating a more complete picture of the social and cultural environment. One of the advantages of the methodology adopted for this study, and a positive feature of working just within living memory, has been the insights given through the case study chapters by people with a visual impairment. These former students have shown an awareness of the weaknesses of some aspects of the schools, but their reasoned judgements of the advantages they obtained in the society of that era have provided a useful foil to the criticisms of revisionist writers and the plaudits given by some of the 'official' sources.

The examination in Chapters Two and Seven of the broader context has demonstrated the need for a history of special education to move away from any single interpretation of causation and towards a Post-Revisionist assertion of the significance of a complex interplay of factors. The influence of the 'agency' of 'disabled' individuals was evident in the inter-war period so that 'social control' was not the dominant motivation behind the development of secondary education for blind children.⁷ The 'strategic power-plays' were as much between the voluntary organisations as between other medical and educational interests. Relationships between public and private interests became symbiotic. The development of inspections and the increase in State funding extended the role of Government, but officials were only able to work tentatively in the 1930s and then, even with the 1944 Education Act to strengthen their position, the remoulding of provision reflected an uneasy compromise between official policy and the 'vested interests' of the controlling charities and LEAs.

Despite the assertiveness of some blind men, Chapter Two has demonstrated the way in which the intellectual climate of the first half of the twentieth century created ignorance and prejudice which worked against the blind. This does confirm the observations of Social Model of Disability writers such as Finkelstein and Oliver that society was, in general, acting in a disabling way.⁸ The reluctance shown in Chapters Four, Six, Nine and Ten by both Government officials and potential employers to make adjustments left blind young people with reduced careers opportunities. The inflexibility of Examination Boards and local authorities created stresses and difficulties in school examinations and then in living in a 'sighted' world.

Where this study would differ from writers such as Armstrong, Borsay and Tomlinson is in the assessment of the positive role played by some special schools working with blind children and young people. The problem with many of these studies has been the tendency to look for one causal factor, and neo-Marxist accounts have ignored the powerful role played by agency. The positive work of individual agency, highlighted by Altenbaugh, cannot be disregarded.⁹ The headteachers and many of the staff had made a long-term commitment to this area of education and were aware that this would probably be the end of advancement in their careers. Chapters Four, Six, Nine and Ten show a desire to overcome some of the constraints presented by society and 'enable' their students so that they could advance and gain opportunities in adult life as citizens: Staff frustration was evident at some of the problems their former students faced. Armstrong has described the traditional humanitarian and medical discourses as taking a firmer hold in the economic growth which started in the 1950s until the problems of the 1970s.¹⁰ Before that humanitarianism was present but there were also conflicts created by the changed situation of state intervention. External pressures did create a caution and both colleges were primarily concerned about their status amongst elite schools rather than transforming society; there was a limit to what any individual establishment, even with the backing of the leading charity in the field, could do to transform deep-seated attitudes.

However, the 'progressive humanitarianism' of individual agency alone cannot explain the development of secondary schooling for blind boys and girls.¹¹ Felicity Armstrong's post-revisionist assertion of the complexity of the picture of the development of special education as a whole is just as true when assessing the factors affecting the development of the education of one disabled group. The experience of Special Education can only be understood when the factors affecting the education of the sensory impaired are separated

out from those of other groups with special educational needs. Even then, there is a need to focus more on personal factors because case studies of the Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges demonstrate that the individual's chances were only partly determined by their perceived disability. The development of special schooling must be placed in the context of the social and cultural environment. The chapters focusing on Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges before and after the 1944 Education Act illustrate the manner in which a nexus of disability, class and gender was involved in the creation of a model of education.

Contrary to Borsay's assumption, all disabled children were not being prepared for a place in the working classes.¹² As has been shown in Chapters Three, Five, Eight and Ten these two secondary schools for the blind were working to present their students as members of the elite groups. The weaknesses must be judged in the terms of the expectations of the public, and then grammar, school education which had to be adopted to provide a chance of advancement, as well as to reassure the 'anxious' parents from the middle classes who were concerned that their children were not excluded from the status expected for their sighted peers. For boys the model of elite schooling adopted resulted in the need to exhibit the characteristics required by the 'hegemonic masculinity', while girls had to conform to notions of lady-like femininity while working within the legal and social obstacles to full equality for women. The consequence was that these blind children were not completely, as Hurt has suggested of special education, *Outside the Mainstream*.

Chapters Four, Six, Nine and Ten illustrate that Worcester and Chorleywood Colleges were working against the perception of blind people as a 'class apart.' By remaining outside the established model for special education, the two schools were helping to create a culture of

resistance which would be important in improving opportunities, and changing expectations, for all blind people in the future. Unlike at most special schools, pupils were given the opportunity to gain more than 'below-average qualifications' and this assisted in establishing the ability of visually impaired students to cope with a mainstream curriculum.¹³ The schools also provided a strategy to enable students to succeed in life. For the boys this did include an arrogance which was to allow them to rise above their weaknesses in living skills. As a result, students were able meet the criteria which Drake has set for determining whether the 'disabled' have achieved Citizenship. A number of them were to advance to participate in 'the decisions that create or recreate the contours of society'.¹⁴ Former students helped to form opinion in education, politics, the media and the law, as well as taking positions in local, national and international charities forwarding the interests of blind people. The creation of these advocates, as well as the example that Worcester and Chorleywood were helping to provide, were making the two schools more than the irrelevant exceptions to the main experience of the 'disabled' that many of the revisionist writers have assumed.¹⁵

However, the same chapters on Worcester and Chorleywood illustrate that the history of the education of blind children cannot be viewed as simply 'enabling' or 'disabling'. The outside pressures were to create their own weaknesses. As was evident in Chapters Four and Nine, staff at Worcester were so busy promoting academic success that many living skills and social needs were ignored. This was partly a reflection of a society where men who married were not expected to have to do domestic chores and in which practical skills were seen as associated with the working classes, but this was not going to assist full independence. The philosophy surrounding boarding in public, as well as special, schools did lead to issues relating to family separation and a measure of isolation which would not

help with re-integration into society. Issues relating to blindness could not be simply ignored in the promotion of the students' academic ability. Achieving academically at a mainstream level can only be a part of the picture if a student is to be truly enabled. Other knowledge and abilities are needed for life. This has to be a lesson for true inclusion.

In order to reach broader conclusions from these case studies and further the understanding of the differences within special education, more detailed examination of the other schools and colleges for the visually impaired would be useful. Payne's study included some information on the Royal Normal College but this ended before 1939, and was not her main emphasis. The nature of the College's impact, as well as an assessment of the change that the 1944 Act made in practice would assist the development of a fuller picture. There is work which could be done on the future destinations of their students which would make for an interesting comparison, as would also a study of the immediate and later employment of those from the elementary or secondary modern schools for the blind.

There did have to be some alteration in the emphasis of the other schools for the blind after the 1944 Act. As comments made by former students and staff would appear to show, there were still elements which certainly do not appear to have been enabling, but there are indications of a more questioning approach. The interview with Mr and Mrs Tooze of Tapton Mount School in Sheffield, completed by Charles Parker as part of his research in the late 1960s, would appear to indicate that not all the 'vested interests' were critical of the idea of integration.¹⁶ Further study of these other establishments could demonstrate the extent to which the influence of the two grammar schools had a role with aspirations and teaching.

The indication of this study that the 'pecking order' of disability very much existed in practice would seem to merit further assessment of the experience of the deaf. A comparison with the post-war development of grammar school education for the deaf at Mary Hare School could suggest that those with sensory handicaps were advantaged over many other groups considered disabled.

Beyond the study of education, other questions have emerged through the thesis about the role of voluntary organisations. The emphasis on the role of charities, such as the RNIB, in influencing policy has highlighted the very different position of men to women in guiding these organisations. Men, including blind men were the leading figures. The impact of gender on the general work they did, and the comparative opportunities they provided, would appear to merit further work.

Any future historical study, but particularly one assessing the impact of visual impairment, should bear in mind the admonition of Kenneth Jernigan, the president of the American National Federation of the Blind and a disability civil rights campaigner:

[T]he lesson commonly derived from ... histories is that the blind have always been dependent upon the wills and the mercies of others. We have been the people things were done to—and, occasionally, the people things were done for—but never the people who did for themselves. In effect, according to this account, we have no history of our own—no record of active participation or adventure or accomplishment, but only (until almost our own day) an empty and unbroken continuum of desolation and dependency. It

would seem that the blind have moved through time and the world not only sightless but faceless—a people without distinguishing features, anonymous and insignificant--not so much as rippling the stream of history.¹⁷

This thesis has asserted the place of blind people in history, demonstrating the manner in which they have not been without influence, either in the creation of some forms of their education or as citizens.

Cook and Swain have claimed that, 'If there is a dominant common story, it is of subjugation in a context of unequal power relations between disabled and non-disabled people'.¹⁸ I would argue that the value of completing a fine-grained study, where events and developments are considered within the culture of the time, lies in the fact that it demonstrates that any narrow pursuit of a 'dominant common story' is unhistorical and denies the reality of unequal power relations between, and within, some groups of disabled people.

11.1 References

¹ Copeland, 161.

² Chapters 4 and 5.

³ Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 20.

⁴ French, *Oral History*, 13.

⁵ Bob Manthorp, 'New perspectives in Educational provision. Notes for Conference Talk to International Council for Education of the Visually Handicapped, Bangkok, July-Aug. 1992,' B27 NCW.

⁶ Disability Discrimination Act, 1995, S.29: Education Act, 1981, S.7.

⁷ Tomlinson, *Sociology*, 51.

⁸ See Ch. 1.1.

⁹ See Chapter 3.

¹⁰ Armstrong, 451.

¹¹ Cole, see Ch.1.1.

¹² Borsay, *Disability*, 97.

¹³ *Ibid*, 116.

¹⁴ Drake, 41.


¹⁵ French, *Oral History*, 408-9.

¹⁶ MS4000/6/1/54/135C CPA.


¹⁷ 'Blindness: Is History Against Us?', Address at the Annual Convention 5/7/73' [article online]. NFB available from <http://nfb.org/legacy/convent/banque73.htm> [3/4/2010].

¹⁸ Cook et al, 308.

Appendix A: Braille and Braille devices

Braille is a code based around six dots placed in a single cell. 

Students have to learn Grade I, where each letter of the alphabet has a Braille symbol (e.g.

Dot 2, 3, 4 and 5 = t , and then to gain speed and fluency they learn Grade II which introduces contractions which can represent words, or syllables (e.g. Dot 2, 3, 4 and 5 = that, dots 5 and 6 next to 2, 3, 4 and 5 = ment). Some students did learn Braille shorthand (Grade III Braille) in which additional contractions are used, and vowels are omitted; this was only used in preparation for personal note-taking in an office or at university. Many students would also have been taught through the special codes which were being developed for Music, Mathematics and Science, as well as some of the contractions used in French Braille.

Most students would have learnt to read Braille across a page from left to right at the same time as learning to write on a hand-frame where they would have worked from right to left and produced the characters in reverse. Most of the early Braille devices used at the schools up until the introduction of the Perkins Brailier required the student to write on the reverse of the paper.

Stainsby-Wayne Brailier

This was developed by Henry Stainsby and Wayne at the Birmingham Royal Institute for the Blind in the early twentieth century. This was a compact and portable braille writer. The keys travelled from right to left along a reglette attached to the base. The difficulty for reading work back immediately was the fact that the student was working on the reverse of

the paper and the paper therefore had to be removed; this made it particularly unsuited to Mathematics problems. Each time a line was completed the reglette had to be manually lifted and slotted into the next pair of holes on the base.

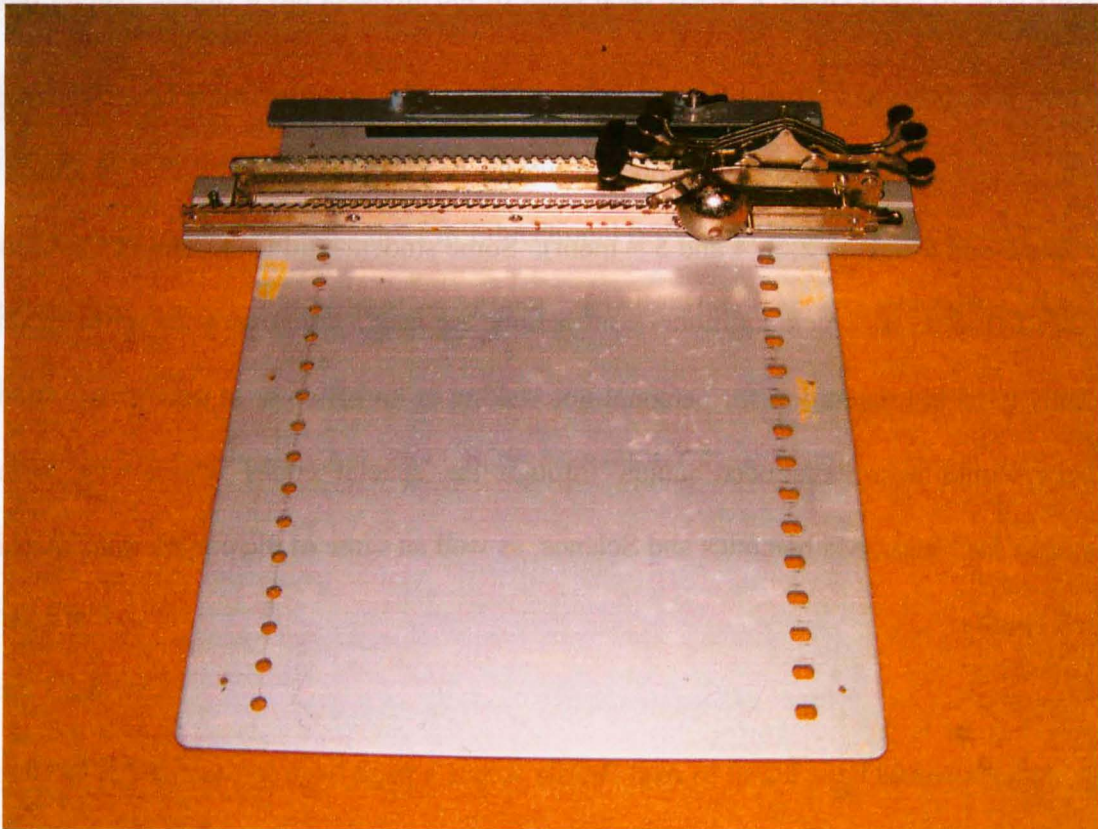


Illustration A-A: Stainsby-Wayne brailier.

Pyke-Glauser Brailier

This was developed by the National Institute for the Blind around 1920. An upward writing model, the paper feeds from the rear and passes under the space bar. The machine has no paper feed rollers. The only movement is that of the carriage that moves from left to right. As a result of the high production costs, not many of these machines appear to have been available for use.

Perkins Brailler

The machine was developed by David Abraham at the Perkins School for the Blind in America. The Second World War delayed production. During the 1950s more than 16,000 machines were produced, although most of the early production was taken up by the American market.

The Perkins Brailler was designed to be tough, easy to use and as quiet as possible, although class teaching is impossible while in use by students. It operates with a roller, similar to a typewriter, and therefore allows quick line spacing, enabling previously embossed paper to be reinserted and more Braille added. Brailleing occurs from left to right across the page. In many ways, this was the greatest step forward in the development of a method of producing Braille. As a result, work can be read immediately, invaluable for a teacher wanting to give instant feedback on work, or for a student wishing to follow workings, such as in Mathematics.



Illustration A-B: Perkins Brailler.

Appendix B: Methods of doing Mathematics

Taylor Frame

This was an arithmetic frame developed by Rev. William Taylor, one of the founders of Worcester College. It had star-shaped eight-angled holes, and metal type. About 1918, a blind Mathematician, Henry Taylor introduced algebra type for use with the Taylor Arithmetic frame. According to the position in which the metal type piece was placed, it could represent a number or mathematical sign (see Illustration B-A). For many years the Taylor frame was the only piece of apparatus used for the teaching of mathematics, but there was no way of specifying what the numbers represented. It was cumbersome and was seen by the writers of the 1936 *Report on the Education of the Blind* as having little practical use for adult life.

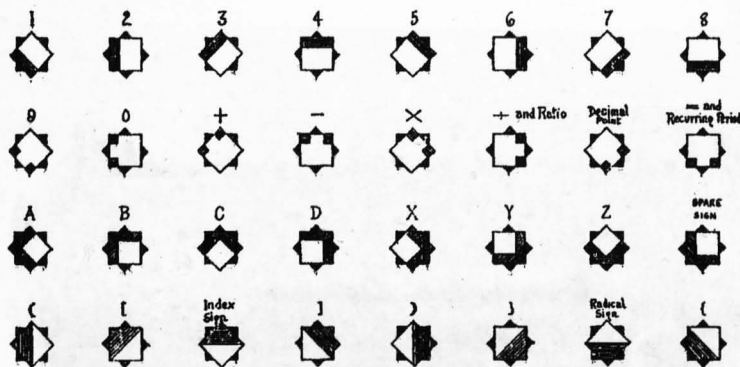


Illustration B-A: Taylor Frame with Arithmetic and Algebra Type.

[J. M. Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind* (Oliver and Boyd, 1930)]

Bonham device

This was devised by Bonham at Worcester to help with the creation of geometrical diagrams; it was not adopted generally. It had a very basic nature:

What looked like a length of hacksaw was set teeth upwards in a board, you placed your braille paper over it and ran a rubber roller over the top to produce raised dotted lines for diagram-making. I think there was some bent hacksaw for curves as well.

[NCWFSA email forum, 4/8/2003]

Bibliography and other Sources

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Some former students have opted to have their first names changed.

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Alice: CW 1938-42

Anne: CW 1950-1957

Barbara: CW 1942-1951

Daphne: CW 1947-1956

David: WCB 1952-9

Dorothy: CW 1936-46

Dot: Lickey Grange School, 1949-58; RNC 1958-61

John: CW 1938-40; WCB 1940-8

Judith: CW 1950-1958

Judy: CW 1946-53

Margaret: CW 1943-47

Mark: WCB 1942-9

Mary: CW 1928-35

Mike: WCB 1939-46

Muriel: CW 1941-43

Paul: WCB 1935-46

Richard: WCB 1945-9

Trevor: RNC 1958-62

Victor: WCB 1928-37

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